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# ***Fides et Ratio:*** **The Perpetual Journey** **of Faith and Reason**

by

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In the 13th encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, of John Paul II, released on 15 October 1998 almost twenty years to the day of his election as Pope, Karol Wojtyla has successfully and confidently reconfirmed the tradition of Catholic teaching. It has been more than one hundred years since the topics of philosophy, reason, faith and truth have been addressed by the Holy See. The last encyclical, *Aeterni Patris*, by Pope Leo XIII in 1879, adopted the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas in order to clarify the relationship of faith and reason and to encourage deeper scholarship in theology by those teaching and studying in the seminaries.<sup>1</sup>

In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II elaborates the central theme of the relationship between faith and reason and their united journey in the search for truth. He cites the fundamental questions of human personhood and sets the answers in the context of the truth of faith in Christ. The connection is the linkage and the intimate relationship between faith and reason, as studied and experienced through the sacred science of theology and the human endeavor of philosophy. The bond of faith and reason is the common thread in this historical tapestry John Paul II has woven as a common theme of human nature and the origin of human action. This concept was formed in the early philosophical writings of John Paul II on

morality and moral values.<sup>2</sup> In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II outlines the historical lineage of philosophical ideologies and cultural norms which have divided faith and reason and have diverted the discipline of philosophy away from the path of wisdom and truth to that of feeling and experience – from the sapiential to the experiential.<sup>3</sup> A critical message in the encyclical is for theologians and philosophers to expand the resources of reason thereby embracing the call to wisdom and, ultimately, on the fertile field of Revelation, to reunite faith and reason in truth.

In his introduction, John Paul II raises the question of meaning which defines the human heart and which is to be answered in an individual and unique way. Yet the search, a restlessness that initiates and terminates in God, is universal. He goes on to characterize the relationship between faith and reason in order to understand how faith strengthens reason and that faith and reason share the common ground of truth. His intention is to refocus and centralize the truth and all theological enquiry, in order to amend the decline in the intellectual endeavor of the Church in the post-conciliar era. He criticizes the philosophical systems that narrow the scope of knowledge and/or devalue the search for truth.

In **Chapter 1** he approaches the source of meaning for human life from a perspective of faith. He further defines Revelation as the wisdom granted from God to humanity, which invites and inspires reason to probe the depths of its mysteries for explanations and truth.<sup>4</sup> He concludes with a discussion of the theology of freedom as bringing faith and theology together.

He continues this theme in **Chapter 2**, demonstrating that the unification of knowledge comes from faith and reason, and that this unified knowledge is the path to truth, to the answers, which the human heart seeks, and to God. He refers to Old Testament and New Testament knowledge by which creation reflects the Creator and to the theme of reason weakened by sin.

**Chapter 3** expands the enquiring nature of reason to seek the universal truth and the nature of the human being to seek an absolute, interior truth. At the zenith of human reason is the religious impulse, the human heart finding fulfillment only in God as the answer to Divine call to friendship and to the source of absolute truth.<sup>5</sup>

In **Chapter 4**, he traces the relationship between faith and reason through a historical account of early Christianity and philosophy. The insights of faith encountered in the writings of the Church Fathers and the scholarship and harmony of faith achieved by the Scholastics, as established by St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Anselm, are contrasted with the "fateful separation" of faith and reason as seen in modernity. The dangers in the separation of faith and reason are accentuated by the displacement of



philosophy from the center to the periphery of modern thought and its subjugation to methodology and utilitarian ends.<sup>6</sup>

The role of the Magisterium is presented in **Chapter 5** as the *diakonia* of the truth. The actions of the Magisterium are shown to have clarified and supported the true, noble role of philosophy. There is a strong appeal to trust in the power of human reason and to promote genuine philosophical enquiry.

John Paul II focuses on the interaction between theology and philosophy in **Chapter 6**, citing their interdependence and the problems with the new scholarship in theology, which have paralleled the weakening of philosophy. He affirms the universality of the Christian claims to the truth and the use of the powers of reason in the search for the truth. The role of East-West cultural traditions and values are considered as a basis for a continuing dialogue, as demonstrated by the leading thinkers from both the East and the West. At the core of this dialogue, John Paul II situates the relationship between faith and reason as a circle that starts with the Word of God and is discovered by theology and philosophy through enquiry, understanding, and truth.

The essence of his message is revealed in **Chapter 7**. He opposes the renewal of the "sapiential" dimension in the search for truth that will verify the natural human capacity to reach and know the truth.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary philosophies fail to find an understanding of truth in this search, and with modernism, demonstrate a criticism of and reluctance to claim a universal truth.<sup>8</sup> He proposes a return to metaphysics to transcend the factual and to explore further an understanding of reality as current trends of thought are imperfect in reaching the truth.

In the **Conclusion**, John Paul II, in *Fides et Ratio*, as a continuation of *Veritatis Splendor*, call for the strength of truth and freedom to endure and to remain open and accessible to every human being in all parts of the world. He reaffirms the confidence in the power of the human mind to be used in freedom without restrictions. This freedom rests in truth's foundation in faith and the commitment of theology and philosophy together to pursue the dynamic relationship of faith, reason, and truth. He draws attention to the universality of the Christian truth and the requirement of theology and philosophy together to safeguard that truth.

Toward the end of considering *Fides et Ratio*, this essay will, first, review the major sections of the encyclical, secondly, discuss the salient features within each section with regard to the importance of John Paul II's message and, finally, conclude with his concepts and insights on truth, faith, and reason.

## Introduction: "Know Yourself"

John Paul II acknowledges that it is the very nature of the human being to question because the human heart desires knowledge and yearns for an answer to these questions.<sup>9</sup> Primal to the human person is the search for the truth of personal existence and meaning. Such fundamental truths can only be discovered through a progressive, perpetual journey of the human mind and heart to the relationship with God and to dwell in His love and know Him.<sup>10</sup> In addition, John Paul II affirms that each human being is endowed with an intensely personal awareness of the self as a unique entity within all of Divine Creation. This cognizance of the self, as a singular characteristic of the human mind, raises questions as to the meaning of existence, nature, and order.<sup>11</sup> The answers to these questions become the truths, which are integrated as knowledge into the narrative of each life. It is the human being's ability to reason and utilize the capacity for truth which truly is the call of the Oracle – *Know Yourself*.<sup>12</sup> John Paul II examines the nature and continuity of such questioning and finds that it crosses temporal and cultural boundaries, in that it has always existed in every culture. In fact, it is an integral part of being, the metaphysical message that is inscribed on the human heart as truth. The journey for this truth defines cultures and traditions and is traveled through them to Jesus Christ as the ultimate truth and end of the journey of Faith.

### Ch. 1 Revelation of God's Wisdom

#### *Jesus, Revealer of the Father*

The Church offers knowledge that has its origin in the Word of God through Revelation, in that the life of faith originates at baptism through an encounter. The Word is freely given in Christ by God, who openly makes Himself known both for our salvation and as a perfection of human knowledge of the mysteries of life and faith. John Paul II reiterates that there is a knowing unique to faith, one that surpasses human reason and expresses truth. This source of knowledge is by the order of reason, but the content is by the order of faith, and faith facilitates reason to understand the mysteries hidden in God.<sup>13</sup> Knowledge of faith is also distinct from philosophical knowledge which is acquired through intellectual and experiential activity. Both philosophy and the sciences raise to the highest level the exercise of natural reason. The life and death of Christ unveils, through time and history, the truth of Revelation and God's plan for salvation of mankind. Time and history provide the avenue for the journey,



with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to the full expression of revealed truth.<sup>14</sup>

Within history, God's plan is revealed by what is known and by what is yet to be known. John Paul II proposes how the Incarnation of the Son of God is a synthesis beyond human intellect that, although fixed in history, transcends time as the validation of meaning for human existence.<sup>15</sup> This gift, offered to all mankind as the ultimate truth to solve the riddle of human existence, as defined in *Gaudium et Spes*, was the theological focal point and the Christological anthropology of Vatican II.

### ***Reason, Before the Mystery***

Within the life of Christ is the knowledge of God the Father, however limited by human understanding. The gift of faith, as an obedient response to God, assists in the comprehension and the credibility of Revelation. In the act of faith, human beings entrust themselves and their reason to Him as the guarantor of truth.<sup>16</sup> For in faith, the intellect and the will advance toward God, in the fulfillment of personal freedom, to live in the truth.

Reason is prompted by signs within Revelation to extend the methodological boundaries in exploring these mysteries – to push to the outer depths of truth. John Paul II cites the commentaries of both St. Thomas and Pascal on the mystery of the Eucharist, whereby faith reveals and confirms what in nature cannot be observed or understood.<sup>17</sup> They mystery of God is received and welcomed in faith which stirs reason's unceasing efforts to enquire and understand. St. Anselm describes the barrenness of human reason as the restless endeavor to achieve ultimate knowledge, the realization of the limited intellectual tools with which to work, and the boundless reality that is God.<sup>18</sup> Yet, the truth of Christian Revelation calls men and women to embrace the mystery of God's plan on the journey to truth, and there to find, unencumbered, their own life's plan on that journey.

According to St. Augustine, "deep within man there dwells the truth".<sup>19</sup> Revelation was the source and nourishment of his rational thought and faith was the guardian of reason and philosophy, for man is closest to the Divine in thought or *mente*.<sup>20</sup> St. Augustine firmly planted the ancient engagement of philosophy and rhetoric in faith as his own method for loving and living the truth. For him truth was not conquered, it was received. Faith gives truth to the intellect and with faith comes all philosophical truth. Faith, truth, and reason were inseparable – he employed rigorous reasoning in his theology to discover and express the deeper sense and meaning of Scripture.<sup>21</sup> St. Augustine exhorted to love

intelligence, love it very much.<sup>22</sup> For it is a love of intelligence that directs one toward the eternal.

## **Ch. 2 Credo Ut Intellegam**

### ***"Wisdom knows all and understands all" (Wis. 9:11)***

The Wisdom texts affirm the profound unity between knowledge from faith and that from reason. Faith is God's gift to man. It is the placement of divine truth in the mind to dwell within the reason and to promote the truths of faith in a rational and scientific content as the perfection of reason. All techniques of reasoning (methods of philosophy), in the search for an explanation, are initiated to an end in the human intellect through exacting patterns of thought to produce a systematic body of knowledge. Faith guides reason to seek, know, and rightly order the truth reason has acquired.

John Paul II defines the noble task of reason as the search for the understanding of faith and truth of Revelation. Faith is a "beacon"; a "divine light" that possesses the mind and confers on it an intellectual framework.<sup>23</sup> Here faith daringly seeks for reasons in God's words, a search for the purity of absolute truth. The elements of faith provide an unending well of knowledge, for the reality achieved in faith is infinitely rich and incorporates the theological truths and concepts to direct the mind and intellect.<sup>24</sup> In reasoning, therefore, weakness and fearfulness are sustained by faith in the embodiment of all knowledge.<sup>25</sup> It is the ultimate mystery of the Word of God that unites faith and reason.

God reveals Himself in nature and our understanding captures and confirms the observations within the natural order.<sup>26</sup> Contemplation on God's works makes accessible certain knowledge that reason alone could not comprehend and instills a wonder and compelling desire within the human mind.<sup>27</sup> The natural human desire for knowledge is a great and endless search to understand the mystery, but in the natural order, the truth calls for effort and perseverance.

### ***"Acquire Wisdom, Acquire Understanding" (Prv. 4:5)***

In the pursuit of truth and wisdom, the authors of the Old Testament were faced with the imperfection of reason. Yet they were not deterred from their journey to the truth because of a conviction of the certitude of God's plan for them. They were moved by God to know Him through a Divine intuition that transcended the empirical and affirmed the potential for metaphysical enquiry.<sup>28</sup> Reason has been wounded by the human



condition and, therefore, is constantly subject to distortions and falsehoods. Only in the person of Christ has this weakness been mended and, now, capable to perceive the wisdom of God. This dilemma was addressed by St. Paul, where he states that in death is the wisdom of the Cross – the source of life and ove.<sup>29</sup>

### **Ch. 3 Intellego Ut Credam**

#### ***Journeying in Search of Truth***

The truth, treasured through time by the Church, is that seed planted within the human heart by God, which defines the longing and desire for Him. Mankind was created to this end and has been endowed with reason's capacities and rightly tuned will to travel toward the infinite.<sup>30</sup> This universal desire has been expressed in every creative human endeavor including philosophy. Reason and knowledge work together to clarify truth and objective reality and drive both the practical and theoretical enquiry of life's meaning. It is an inescapable desire and duty to search out the truth of our destiny, steadfastly, and with certainty and to anchor human existence to the universal and absolute truth.<sup>31</sup> This truth, gained partially through a distillation of personal philosophy, convictions, and experience, opens the possibilities to the final explanations, which silences all questioning.

#### ***The Different Faces of Human Truth***

The search for truth, deeply rooted in the human person, is confined by the limits of reason, the inconstancy of the human heart, and the distractions of the world.<sup>32</sup> In spite of the influences of fear, doubt, and anxiety to divert the search, confidence and belief in the truth sustains the enterprise. This truth can be empirical, from experimentation, philosophical, from the human intellect, or religious, from the truth revealed in Christ. Most truths are believed without verification and accepted as entrusted knowledge acquired from others.<sup>33</sup> Knowledge gained through truth and grounded in trust is bound to truth, as exemplified by the martyrs in bearing the evidence of love and witness to the truth of life in Christ. It is the nature of the human being to seek the truth, intimately, as ulterior truth, attained through reason and trust in friendship as a notable, unique human act; one that the ancient philosophers describe as the proper state for sound philosophical enquiry.<sup>34</sup>

John Paul II suggests that the Christian faith presents to us the truth and the One in whom we can entrust ourselves, and that within the order of



grace, lies the opportunity to participate in the mystery of Christ as Truth and the knowledge of God as the fulfillment of the search. Within the truth of Christ, philosophical and revealed truth, reason and faith, are united in a certainty found in the natural order and understood in the light of reason.

#### **Ch. 4 Relationship Between Faith and Reason**

##### ***Important Moments in the Encounter of Faith and Reason***

To spread the truth of Revelation beyond the confines of myth, the apostles had to utilize contemporary philosophical theories, in which a bond was formed between reason and religion in order to provide a rational foundation for belief. The fathers of the Church and St. Paul were cautious in promoting Christianity's adoption of philosophy and the engagement of faith and reason. Philosophy seeks wisdom and its discipline clarifies the way to truth; in Christian Revelation the search is for the truth about God.<sup>35</sup> Consequently, theology grew and developed as a separate discipline from philosophy.

Greek philosophy provided the techniques for a rational explanation of the universe. However, these philosophical methods and ideas have been employed since the 2nd century to formulate and express concepts foreign to Greek philosophers. The great Doctor of the West, St. Augustine, unified the thought within the Bible to speculative thinking and reasoning and brought to his writings a personal tone based on his own experience of faith. Likewise the early Christian thinkers elevated reason in the relationship between faith and philosophy to welcome the truths of Revelation.

The first important contacts between Greek philosophy and Christian faith were by St. Augustine with Plotinus and St. Thomas Aquinas with Aristotle. Both theologians exemplified the intellectual achievements made by human reason to understand the meaning of divine Revelation. They used philosophy as a rational tool for the expression of objective knowledge within the human mind. Individually, they used different philosophical systems to arrive at their respective interpretations of Christian doctrine and formulated two separate theologies to clarify the truth in Scripture. In the 13th century, Scholastic philosophy and theology were palindromes. Reason, trained in a rigorous philosophical discipline, was poised to find meaning and discover explanations to understand the contents of faith.<sup>36</sup> St. Anselm emphasized that the intellect seeks to know as an act of love and the desire for truth drives reason forward to understand the mysteries of faith.<sup>37</sup>

By the 19th century, philosophy had lost its direction and turned to deconstruction and despair.<sup>38</sup> Philosophy had relinquished its clarity of

method and purpose and lost sight of truth, thus, leaving the domain of thought and ideas disconnected from reality and reason. In time philosophy was absorbed into political thought and social theory. The human person, subject to reason and isolated in freedom, was destined to despair without a system for the exploration of truth and wisdom (philosophy) or for understanding truth and faith (theology).<sup>39</sup>

### *Enduring Originality of the Thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*

Pure reason alone will not suffice, it must be contained within a working philosophical scheme where reason is structured and organized in the rigor of methodology. John Paul II recognizes that true philosophy is faithful to its unique task of enquiry and binds the relationship between faith and reason.<sup>40</sup> This appeal echoes previous requests for the renewal of scholarship in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas as the norm for theological study. In the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas systematized and included the substance of all Church doctrine up to that time, with emphasis on St. Augustine and the Church Fathers.<sup>41</sup> He endeavored to include all philosophical thought in the joining of faith and reason and he recognized that the natural order contributed to divine Revelation. The Christian faith surpasses the capacity of reason but is not oppose to those principles that the human reason knows naturally.<sup>42</sup> Faith, as a freely chosen exercise of thought, seeks out reason and perfects it. The Church holds St. Thomas' thought as the model for philosophical reasoning in theology. He used great intellectual courage and honesty to retain the purity of Christian Revelation while using the methods of secular philosophy. Christian theology was defined as faith invested by grace with reason on the authority of God's Revelation.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, he acknowledged wisdom as a gift from the Holy Spirit and its pivotal role in the maturation of the knowledge of divine Revelation.<sup>44</sup> This wisdom is connatural and distinct from wisdom gained through the intellect (philosophical wisdom) or the wisdom based upon Revelation (theological wisdom).<sup>45</sup> He positions the source of all truth in the Holy Spirit who moves the mind to understand the truth as universal truth.<sup>46</sup>

In *Aeterni Patris*, Leo XIII states that "it is this golden wisdom of St. Thomas that is to be recognized and made known by all, along with the restoration of the right use of the philosophic discipline in association with faith" and "reason, borne on the wings of Thomas to its human height while faith could scarcely expect more or stronger aids from reason."<sup>47</sup> The influence of philosophy complements the intellectualism within theology and serves to connect faith and reason in the formation of truth within the mind. John Paul II suggests that philosophy be restored to a pure form of



rational science with its inherent respect for reason, and thus, banish the distrust or dismissal of reason in modern philosophies.<sup>48</sup>

### ***Drama of the Separation of Faith and Reason***

In the late medieval period the unity of the sciences and philosophy with theology was weakened by the growing body of knowledge based in rationalism and skepticism. The development of Western philosophical thought became exclusive of faith and totally dependent upon reason's grasp. Philosophy, in modernity, no longer represented a wisdom, but merely the collection of facts of human knowledge which served to promote the utilitarian ends and the will to power.<sup>49</sup> As a result, there remains an unrelenting fear in human existence due to a subjective and false sense of certainty in man's own capabilities.<sup>50</sup> In the area of science, for instance, a positivist idealism has superseded all Christian vision and replaced it with an attachment to the power of technology.<sup>51</sup> This supremacy of progress over moral and ethical consequences endangers the human person. The attraction to rationalism has degenerated the spirit of philosophy to stark nihilism, which discounts the hope for future attainment of truth, or that there is any truth at all. In spite of the growing separation of faith and reason, theology and philosophy, John Paul II maintains that there remains much fertile ground within philosophical thinking for the discovery of truth and a return to the unity of faith and reason.

## **Ch. 5 Magisterium's Interventions in Philosophical Matters**

### ***Magisterium's Discernment as *Diakonia* of the Truth***

The role of the Magisterium in this journey is that of the *Diakonia* of the truth, an exclusive mission which that role imparts.<sup>52</sup> John Paul II sets the narrative on how the Church, with the believers, as the Body of Christ, travel through life to truth. *Diakonia* stems from the Greek word, which describes the many-faceted concept of serving. In the Old Testament, the emphasis was on the willingness for service with respect, especially towards God, and late in Christianity, for service in the Church as a service of love.<sup>53</sup> In the New Testament, Christ's view of service came from the Old Testament command to love God and one's neighbor and makes service the act which renders one His disciple.<sup>54</sup> He instills that serving is greater than being served, and by this conceptual change in tradition, Christ institutes a new pattern for human relationships, as evidenced by his own

action in washing the feet of His disciples.<sup>55</sup> In a wider sense, *diakonia* implies to be serviceable, and with Christ's mission, it takes on the full sense of Christian love for neighbor and the identifiable mark of true discipleship in Christ. Today in the Church, the *diakonia* of the truth is the ministry of the Word and the call to act on that Word as given by God for His glory and for the edification of the entire community of believers as the Body of Christ.

### ***Church's Interest in Philosophy***

The Church has clarified and supported the noble role of philosophy. To search for the truth and to live the truth in faith aided by reason becomes the relationship between theology and philosophy. Reason, strengthened by faith, ascends by faith to truth; the highest point of the intellect and the mind that engenders freedom. At this point freedom and faith are coexistent. As a "love of wisdom", philosophy incorporates the human need to question and is the resource to arrive at the truth, the answers to life's meaning.

## **Ch. 6 Interaction Between Philosophy and Theology**

### ***Knowledge of Faith and Demands of Philosophical Reason***

Throughout history the evolution of thought has paralleled the evolution of cultures as each one has borne their own individual understanding and wellspring of wisdom. Under the aegis of philosophical methods and knowledge, East and West have defined a separate cultural character to foster and guide their societies in the search for the truth.<sup>56</sup> John Paul II declares that the criteria basic to the realm of culture and religion are: 1) the universality of the human spirit, 2) the need to reflect on the truth of being, and 3) the universality of the Gospel message. Tradition and values within a cultural experience steady the path to truth and open the way to truth that is transcendent to its identity. A unifying factor in all peoples is the desire for truth. Faith, truth, and culture are inseparable; the wisdom of cultural traditions is essential to the Church's philosophical heritage and it directs her encounter and engagement with cultural differences.<sup>57</sup> It is the universality of the Christian message, the word of Christ, which transcends all cultural differences and unites all paths to the truth. Christ, as the source of all truth, satisfies this universal desire for truth and the ulterior drive toward fulfillment. At Pentecost, the message and directive was the unchanging truth of God revealed to all cultures and peoples of the world. This message of the faith has been enriched and



passed down through the great Christian theologians who distinguished themselves through continued philosophical enquiry and theological tradition.

The tasks of theology require philosophical enquiry, as the two branches of theology, the *auditus fidei* and the *intellectus fidei* support and engage reason.<sup>58</sup> The speculative enquiry and disciplined reasoning of *intellectus fidei* requires the use of philosophical traditions and methodologies to critically formulate narratives and arguments, and lend to reason the ability to articulate clear knowledge, especially for moral theology and philosophical ethics. In addition to questioning and reflection, speculation is inherent in the human intellect. Reason promotes speculation through exacting patterns of thought and logical ordering of information to produce a systematic body of knowledge, which is contained within individual ethical and cultural traditions. The contribution of philosophy is to complement the New Testament teachings on freedom and responsibility of moral acts, within its vision of human nature and society, and use these rigorous principles and teachings to arrive at ethical decisions.<sup>59</sup> In fundamental theology, the alliance between faith and philosophical thought is viewed as faith utilizing and enriching reason through conferred knowledge and the truth of Revelation. Reason, when strengthened by faith, attains a clearer and deeper perception of the truth.

The resultant unification of philosophy and theology will serve to ground reason in faith and to acquire the truths of Revelation. In the *Summa Contra Gentiles*, St. Thomas appealed to the rationality of reason and suggested that theology promotes the rationality of philosophy, for truth in Revelation and truth in the human mind come from the same source, God.<sup>60</sup> Reason is led to its true home in Revelation by faith. In the clearest sense, Revelation perfects reason in faith through grace. Truth is borne of this rational (right) ordering of reason and it is here that philosophy discovers its true nature in which it becomes more, not less, rational under the influence of Revelation.<sup>61</sup> In fact, philosophy is the horizon through which reason and faith are united in truth. The intellectual light in the human mind is a reflection of the divine over which God is the master, a concept held by many Christian philosophers, i.e., St. Bonaventure, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, and St. John Chrysostom.<sup>62</sup>

It is not the intention of John Paul II to suggest that philosophy should be subordinated to or deduced from theology. Philosophy must exist as a separate, distinct discipline of thought to study truth and wisdom in order to elevate the mind to the limits of natural knowledge.

## ***Different Stances of Philosophy***

First, philosophy, as independent from Revelation, searches for truth within the natural order with the aid of autonomous thought, concepts, and arguments. The union of the intellect and the will inspires the assent of faith and perfect free will in accord with grace. Secondly, Christian philosophy, which employs philosophical enquiry in the context of faith, is either subjective, reflecting the thought, or objective, representing the content of reason's endeavor.<sup>63</sup> Theology recruits and requires the autonomy of philosophy for the critical use of reason within the light of faith to confirm the universality of its truths. The Magisterium has made St. Thomas the guide and model for the perfect merging of the demands of reason and the power of faith in the search for truth in theological studies.<sup>64</sup> Theology demands of philosophy that truth be unified and universal, and that philosophy utilize its rules and principles to achieve truth.

Revelation becomes the common ground for philosophical and theological enquiry and through belief and thought commences a true assent to faith. Theology undertakes to expose what can be known about God through Revelation, therefore, theological knowledge is a process of progressive and collective reflection to enhance and clarify foundational knowledge.<sup>65</sup> Philosophical knowledge, on the other hand, emerges from new syntheses and/or new philosophical insight, which does not change, but serves to ground and incorporate new knowledge. John Paul II reminds us that there exists a core of philosophical insight, which does not change, but serves to ground and incorporate new knowledge. He is ever aware of the primacy of philosophical enquiry as a critical ongoing endeavor to comprehend reality without the restriction or exclusion of any singular system of thought.<sup>66</sup> Yet, in both philosophy and theology, reflection, the simmering of reason and faith upon the Revealed Word, supercedes alterations in methods, technique, and interpretations. In addition to basic philosophical norms, there is a spiritual heritage for mankind, which exists as universal principles held by all for the good of society. The derivation and respect for these principles are the basis for the conceptual foundation of right reason, *recta ratio*.<sup>67</sup>

## **Ch. 7 Current Requirements and Tasks**

### ***Indispensable Requirements of the Word of God***

Sacred scripture provides the perspective for human life through *Imago Dei* and the model for moral conduct in the person of Christ, our moral teacher. The meaning of human existence is found within these



Biblical texts of the Incarnation. Yet today we face a crisis in the understanding of life's meaning due to the fragmentation of knowledge expressed by doubt, skepticism, and nihilism. The human spirit is drawn away from transcendent vision, thinking, and inner unity. It is the sapiential task of all Christians, especially philosophers and theologians, to reunite the whole of knowledge to truth weaving together the wisdom of the ancient philosophers, the faith of the Patristic Fathers, the scholarship and great rational methodology of the Scholastics, and the depth and insight of modern contemporary thinkers.<sup>68</sup>

John Paul II calls for the return of a "sapiential dimension" to philosophy, to verify the human capacity to know and to seek the truth, the clear and simple truth of Sacred Scripture. This philosophical dimension is metaphysical where reality and truth transcend the factual and empirical to realize the spiritual nature and personal dignity of man and the value of revealed truth. Its importance lies in defining the essence of reality beyond experience and language, but within the reach of reason.<sup>69</sup>

He sees in the current trends of some modern thinkers an attempt to restore tradition and to approach knowledge, not as a recanting of the past but as an incorporation of the cultural heritage of all mankind.<sup>70</sup> Tradition stands as the monument to the ages, not possessed by humanity but as a beacon to illuminate future thought. In addition to this human cultural endowment, theologians have the tradition of the Church, grounded in the truths of Revelation, to guide and inspire them in the search for knowledge. The continuity between contemporary philosophy and philosophy in the Christian Tradition forms a relationship intended to merge the dangers of some contemporary currents in philosophical thought. He goes on to identify these theories (i.e., eclecticism, historicism, scientism, pragmatism, and nihilism) and the dangers hidden within them.<sup>71</sup>

Within these trends of thought lie the methodological and historical errors that destroy or manipulate the continuity of philosophical doctrine. The discipline of reason is weakened and its integration with knowledge and truth is lost resulting in the impoverishment of human thought and its relationship to faith. Yet a more insidious danger is the subordination of ethical principles and values to pluralist opinions in which moral decisions are no longer made by the individual, but generated and regulated by a majority. The resolution of moral and ethical dilemmas, no longer objective truth, is in peril due to the deconstruction and negation of the identity and dignity of human existence. Humanity is isolated from God; truth, freedom and the essence of the human spirit is muted and exposed to experience evil without defense. John Paul II reminds us how rationalist optimism, the triumph of reason as the source of all happiness and freedom, has failed miserably and left despair in its wake.<sup>72</sup> Science and technology

vainly attempt to nurture the viability of this illusion of humanity's autonomous destiny outside the certitude of faith and truth.

As a humanist and philosopher, John Paul II instructs us to give intellectual energy and attention to metaphysics and phenomenology. The search for an ultimate truth that transcends man grounds the human capacity to know truth and directs reason to the transcendent truth of being. When this search for truth is neglected or ignored there emerges a loss of confidence in truth and a distrust in the human capacity for knowledge which positions one to accept and all views with equal validity and credibility.<sup>73</sup> In such an undifferentiated pluralism, truth is replaced by opinion, the lowest form of understanding and knowledge according to Plate.<sup>74</sup>

The nature of truth is revealed in the complexity of knowledge and in the diverse forms of truth within the intelligence (mind). If there is a higher order of being (God), then there is also a higher order of truth, and the mind perceives these orders as stages of intelligibility, fastened at each level by evidence, either empirical or phenomenological.<sup>75</sup> Being and knowing are united in faith and, together, they transcend the truth. For John Paul II, metaphysical enquiry is an integral part of the assent of reason and faith to the truth. Within this metaphysics resides the core of human dignity, defined by the very nature of humanity, and the quality that sets us apart as children of God. Experience, reason, inwardness, and human dignity are the essential elements of his phenomenology and metaphysics.<sup>76</sup> He concludes with, "theology which draws its principles from revelation as a new source of knowledge is confirmed by the intimate association between faith and metaphysical reasoning."<sup>77</sup>

### ***Current Tasks for Theology***

If theology should surrender the voice of the Word and the work of revealing that Word, its power is relinquished. John Paul II calls for a revitalization of theology; to bring the silence in order to listen for the voice and regain the principles that emerge from reuniting faith and reason.<sup>78</sup> Then theology will fulfill its function and recover its authority to teach the truth of faith and Revelation. Theology must utilize every expression of the Word of God because the mystery of faith will always exceed the capacity of the human mind.<sup>79</sup> The Word demands *intellectus fidei*, a committed attempt to understand the faith with all the tools of reason and intellection in the human mind. The epistemology of faith is the ultimate truth of God found in reflection that aims toward the enlightenment of the mind and knowledge of God. Thus, it is the duty of



theologians and philosophers to explore and expound different aspects of the truth within Revelation.

The role of theology throughout history has been to interpret Revelation and to integrate the faith in accord with changing and developing cultural needs. John Paul extends this challenge to philosophy as a call to unity.<sup>80</sup> The heart of theological enquiry is the contemplation and careful analysis of the mysteries contained within Revelation and Sacred Scripture; it is the spirit of philosophical enquiry to establish the connection between meaning and the truth of the events found within the Gospel texts. Philosophy enables truth to transcend language and time and to acquire absolute and universal value beyond the transition of time and culture. Within the realm of philosophy, concepts retain their enduring epistemological value and the truth of their propositions, yet remain open to speculation and new methods for evaluating truth. The Holy Father reminds us that theology must assume the demanding role of understanding revealed truth.<sup>81</sup> This task is empowered through a philosophy of being, by which theology is more than a custodian of rules and terminology, to gain a new perspective on the question of being and to evaluate the relationship between faith and metaphysical reasoning.

Critical now in the current crisis of truth, this relationship aids moral theology in the formation and growth of the moral life of believers; philosophy defines the meaning of natural human capacities that include metaphysical knowledge, self-reflection, moral conscience, and the pursuit of the true and the good. Philosophers must share their findings from these natural explorations with theologians who then must reveal the meaning of these unique human capacities.<sup>82</sup> In this way, theology reflects on the truth of the embodied spirit of man, made in God's image and destined for eternal life in God.

### **Conclusion**

John Paul II concludes his encyclical message by reaffirming the necessity to revisit, in depth, the association between faith and philosophy and the influence of philosophical thought on culture and theology.<sup>83</sup> Throughout the history of Western thought, the sciences of faith and reason, theology and philosophy, have together explored the unique mysteries manifested within Revelation. He stresses the unequivocal value this relationship has brought to human thought in the conceptual development of human dignity and knowledge of life's meaning. Questions that were inscribed in human nature by God and answered through the wisdom and trust within the Word of God.<sup>84</sup> John Paul II designates this as a new evangelization, a philosophy which fulfills the requirement of

theology to explore the truth of Revelation within the challenge of diverse cultural identities and the Christian tradition. To answer this appeal for the renewal of humanity, Christian philosophers must advance a deeper reflection and comprehension, guided by reason's light, of Divine Revelation to address the issues facing humanity.

He encourages theologians to embody philosophical wisdom and methodology to explore the revealed truth in the Word of God and to encompass the metaphysical dimension of truth in all philosophical endeavors; mostly to those entrusted with the scholarly preparation and training of seminarians. They are consigned to provide a sound philosophical foundation for the communication of faith to the world. Additionally, he appeals to all philosophers, respecting the rightful autonomy of their discipline, to employ the rich tradition of enquiry and to formulate a genuine ethics for mankind in response to the compelling questions which arise from the Word of God.<sup>85</sup>

To scientists, the explorers of the universe and all its mysteries, he extends admiration and gratitude for their achievements and requests that any new knowledge be tempered by the sapiential bounds of philosophical and ethical values in order to preserve and perpetuate the dignity of the human person.<sup>86</sup> In general, he entreats all human beings to reflect on the search for truth and meaning, to know as we are known, in the love of Christ and to abide in that Wisdom with the freedom to know God as the answer to the questions of life.

This encyclical is enriched by and entrusted with the deep thread of charity that crowns the Christian personalism of John Paul II. "When God crowns our merits, He crowns His own gifts."<sup>87</sup> The strong belief and personal trust of John Paul II in the human capacity and power for knowledge, in human wisdom, and in the attainment of truth with faith is a hallmark of his Christian humanism. He is committed to the search for meaning and truth finding its proper end in Jesus Christ, the final truth. In *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II calls us all to the way of truth through the restoration of philosophical and theological enquiry that is positioned in the relationship between faith, reason, and truth. All knowledge is the product of this ongoing enquiry which rightly orders the interior, spiritual assent of the human being through a unique, personal, metaphysical drama, to the apex of that drama, the face to face visions of God.

His meditations conclude with a prayer to the Blessed Virgin, the Seat of Wisdom, and exemplar for philosophers. As a gift freely given, the discipline of philosophy is called to its highest expression in joining with theology to create a fruitful understanding of the faith.<sup>88</sup> For the Ancient Fathers, Mary was the image of true philosophy and a sure haven for all who devote their lives to the search for wisdom.<sup>89</sup>



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