

# International Journal of Human Sciences Research

## CATHOLIC THEOLOGY: A COMPLETE SCIENCE

---

*Omundsen de Melo Costa Junio*

Ordem dos Teólogos do Brasil

Eunápolis – Bahia

<http://lattes.cnpq.br/5898586719279729>

*Éverton Nery Carneiro*

Universidade do Estado da Bahia

Valença – Bahia

ORCID: 0000-0002-4240-1246

All content in this magazine is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution License. Attribution-Non-Commercial-Non-Derivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).



**Abstract:** Catholic Theology has strived, throughout its history, to become an autonomous science. Since the patristics, in the first centuries Catholic theologians have been working incessantly on top of what was passed on as material to the first priests, later to the scholastics, in a set of narratives of miraculous events and the effort to put it all together, organized, selecting, analyzing and confronting with reason to this day is a scientific feat that no other science has been able to do in history. This was its first way of articulating itself doctrinally as a science, and, in these terms, with this completeness, there is no modern science, which in its internal organization has achieved this with such consistency and solidity, so Catholic Theology is a model of complete science.

**Keywords:** Catholic Theology, Bible, Science, Method, God.

## INTRODUCTION

Theology in general is a scientific polemic, because the rational effort to try to harmonize what is apparently contradictory and scientifically, an arduous task. Dealing with the supernatural and the sacred, in the light of human reason, is a challenge that Catholic Theology has assumed and been able to respond to throughout history.

Catholic Theology is the science that deals with God and divine things, in the light of reason, using its own principles of investigation, supported by its analytical and demonstrative capacity, evolving in method and research over the centuries. His method was developed in the work of great Catholic theologians who contributed to its improvement, such as Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Athanasius, Saint Boaventura, etc. solving theological problems of all kinds, finding rational solutions for each one, in their own time, solidifying Catholic Theology as a science.

## DEVELOPMENT

Theology and Philosophy make up the so-called “sacred sciences”, but from the second century onwards, with apologetics, still based on Platonic arguments, Catholic Theology begins to answer questions of human reason, from the accumulated acts of faith, a fact that distinguished it from philosophy. It then begins to define some assumptions, as it develops, defining exclusive criteria for it to be exercised, such as the need for a movement of personal change, in order to delve into the investigative experience of its mysteries, an aspect that Philosophy, for example, did not require. This change, however, must only be a change of mentality or attitude, but a metanoia (μετάνοια), as Benedict XVI called it: “*change of subject*” (RATZINGER, 2012, p. 44).

Since its beginnings, Catholic Theology goes through countless questions and always manages to produce scientific answers each time it is confronted, and like all science, it can and must be questioned, as there is no problem with that. It is through the exercise of questions and doubts that any science moves and is strengthened, and with theology it is no different. We can cite as an example Gnosticism, one of the first problems faced, which surreptitiously undermined Catholic Theology in the Patristic period and that through Saint Irenaeus of Lyon, at that time, theologically he managed to respond to the syncretism and esoterism that mingled with theology. The same happened with Arianism, born within the Catholic Church itself, when it questioned a theological truth and moved theologians to reexamine the doctrinal foundations, and consequently produce a scientific answer to the question, through debates, clashes and reflections, internally and conciliar way, resulting in important reinforcements in its foundations, in the light of Saint Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers.

Faced with each theological problem faced, a major theological re-examination is carried out in Catholic Theology and the results are conclusions that, increasingly well-founded scientifically, give strength and solidification to theology as a science throughout the history of humanity.

Moving forward in time, we have the contribution of Saint Augustine, with his perception that theological truth was not readily defined and dominated, as advocated by Manichaeism, nor impossible to be achieved, as defined by Cicero, an issue that once again moved the field of Catholic Theology, raising the discussion and scientific production to an even more robust level. His theoretical-scientific contribution showed a way to develop theology, at first, in the light of the Neoplatonism of Plotinus and Porphyry, which pointed to a new reflection on the possibility of human reason knowing the truth, but that from Saint Ambrose, managed to harmonize the issue between faith (theological) and reason (philosophical), which even though they are different sciences collaborate with each other.

Summarized in an abstract way, it can be said that Augustine's experience turns towards a discovery of humility. The error of intelligence is linked to the corruption of the heart by pride and man only finds the beatifying truth when he bends his intelligence to faith his will to grace through humility. (GILSON, 2007, p. 433)

The effort of Saint Augustine when he freed himself from the proud Manichean thought and the limitation of Cicero's thought, and understood the theology of Saint Ambrose, paved a scientific path for Catholic Theology, which was no longer confused with Philosophy, but was associated with it. to collaborate in scientific research.

At this moment, theological scientific production starts to deal with more specific themes focused on the reality of religion and

spirituality in the deeper understanding of the sacred and the deepening of the sacred scriptures, so that the dedication to theology more specifically gained strength in the scientific field.

Going forward in time, it is important to highlight the work of Saint Thomas Aquinas, as one of the great Catholic theologians, who in the 13th century already knew that the "Sacred Doctrine" - as theology was called - was an established science and in the face of weak arguments of some scientists of the time, that the scientific facts treated by theology would be based only on faith, he defended the theological-scientific thesis that opposing faith and reason would be absurd, since faith is a rational act and reaffirmed the importance of collaboration between philosophy and theology.

To St. Thomas Aquinas faith and reason are not its two realities that compete with each other, but that complement each other and this way he ended this ancient theological-philosophical demand that still persisted, with scientific authority, reaffirmed until contemporary times, as in the Apostolic Letter of Saint John Paul II: "[...] *St. Thomas has always been proposed by the Church as a teacher of thought and a model for the correct way of doing theology*". (JOÃO PAULO II, 1998, no. 43).

From the thirteenth century onwards, Catholic Theology established itself, even more, as a positive (in the sense of *auditus fidei*) and speculative (in the sense of *intellectus fidei*) science, which does not detach itself from reason to examine its doing, not that it was not before. As a speculative science, it differed from the so-called "theoretical sciences" by positioning itself, as a science in the theoretical field, with its well-defined object, since the first cause (metaphysics) is God. To understand better, let's see:

What the human intellect knows directly

and primarily are the natures of visible (material) things, through this knowledge one can arrive at the knowledge that there are immaterial natures and an indirect (negative) knowledge of what they are, or rather, to a knowledge of what they are not. This knowledge is obtained by a causal reasoning from the effects (non-proportional of immaterial substances), or by a process of surpassing (taking the existing perfections of material beings to the limit), or even by a process of removal (denying the imperfections of beings). materials). (NICOLAS, 2003, p. 34 and 35).

In this sense, the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas resolves the issue of relativism between faith and reason that existed until then, as well as all the thinking that was fighting around words, because his thinking does not start from philosophy to build theology, but from the act of faith, and within the act of faith is reason. Thus, Catholic Theology is strengthening itself in the academic and scientific environment even more and gaining notoriety among scientists from different areas, overcoming the period of the Middle Ages and advancing to the modern world even more firmly and recognized.

In the following centuries, Catholic Theology will undergo its greatest scientific ordeal, from the theological conclusions of João Duns Scotus, radicalized by William of Ockham, who questioned the primacy of reason in theological investigation. This reasoning will lead, later in history, to the Lutheran revolution, which will develop a path that will divide Theology between: Catholic and Protestant, the first considering the analogical logic and the second considering the univocal logic in the investigation. At this historical moment, theology takes two different paths, because on the one hand, Luther rejects the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas and consequently Aristotelian philosophy and on the other hand Catholic theologians persist in the Thomistic line.

Protestant Theology is structured by understanding faith as an act of pure trust, while Catholic Theology remains reaffirming faith as an action of the intellect (reason), driven by the will, but still an intellectual act. These two paths lead to different conclusions, which historically will no longer be found, despite both methodologically maintaining a similar structure.

This theological "schism" once again put Catholic Theology in check, which needed to respond to the nascent Protestant revolution, because while Protestant Theology was established under the aegis of a practical theology, based on the exercise of spirituality, which is independent of reason, Catholic Theology reaffirmed its Thomist-Aristotelian rationale.

Protestant Theology, as in the words of Martin Luther himself, when commenting on Psalm 51, has the proper object of theology the man guilty of sin, and God, in revealed history, making clear the rupture between Theology and Philosophy, while Theology Catholic remained in the study of God as transcendent, valuing all material brought for theological analysis, in its tradition, maintaining the scientific alliance with philosophy.

Catholic Theology remains unified, reaffirming that the act of faith does not remain intellectual later, it already appears as a relationship between intellect and faith and Protestant theology begins to subdivide, giving rise to several currents that at times harmonize and at times diverge, in relation to the act of faith and reason. In this sense, Catholic Theology passed through the entire Modern Age, striving to maintain unity and scientific coherence, already standing out among the other nascent sciences.

Universities in Christian Europe in the Middle Ages became the most significant educational and intellectual institutions since classical times, characterized by their

form of organization, where freedom for the study of diverse subjects gained greater space, including, from that century the letter encyclical: *Parens scientiarum*, of Pope Gregory IX, who legitimized the university as an ecclesiastical institution.

Catholic Theology then begins to develop specific areas, such as canon law and biblical exegesis, very guided by the ecclesiastical body within the universities. In this period, Catholic Theology was already established as a science within universities at the same levels of recognition of medicine and philosophy, opening space for dialogue with all the sciences developed at the time, as the historian Regine Pernoud exposes, in her work "Luz sobre a Idade Média":

[...] Created by the Papacy, the University has an entirely ecclesiastical character: the professors all belong to the Church, and the two great orders that illustrate, in the 13th century, Franciscan and Dominican, go there, soon to be covered in glory, with a St. Bonaventure and a St. Thomas Aquinas; students, even those not destined for the priesthood, are called clerics, and some of them use tonsure – which is not to say that theology is only taught there, since its program includes all the great scientific and philosophical disciplines, from grammar to dialectics, through music and geometry. (PERNOUD, 1996. pp. 98).

The method of scholastic study and discussion, the *disputatio*, was the main method employed in advanced studies debates in medieval universities. *Suma Teológica*, that was written by St. Thomas Aquinas, is completely anchored in this method. Other fields of study that stood out were natural philosophy (generally anchored in Aristotle's metaphysics and physics), music, and astrology.

The advent of the positive sciences, however, radicalized in scientificity, with the requirement of verifiability, so that any field of study could be established as a science and

once again Catholic Theology was questioned, but the fact is that all the doubts raised were examined. with due scientific rigor, by the theorists themselves and were answered in their entirety and demonstrating that even by this sieve it is a complete science. The fact is that the real reasons for the resistance to the inclusion of Catholic Theology among the sciences are not always objective.

In contemporary times, old questions are still raised and Catholic Theology manages to give scientific answers to these provocations, and not even the principle used by Descartes (methodical doubt) was able to raise a hundredth of the doubts that Catholic theologians raised to establish Catholic Theology as a science.

The collective elaboration, passed from generation to generation (beginning in one and continuing systematically in the other) with logical coherence and maintaining an impeccable sequence, was only carried out in Catholic Theology, in no other science, even today it is possible to see a model of such efficiency of historically continuous organized rational and systematic investigation.

## CONCLUSION

Theology, contrary to what one might imagine, does not take the knowledge of God out of reality, it brings it into human reality and Catholic Theology follows this logic based on study, research and production from scripture, magisterium and tradition. as a model for doing theology.

Dogmatic theology must be ordered in such a way that biblical themes come first. Students will be exposed to the contribution of the Eastern and Western Church Fathers to the faithful interpretation and transmission of each of the truths of Revelation, as well as the subsequent history of Dogma, taking into account its relationship with the general history of the Church. (OPTATAM TOTIUS, item 16)

Catholic Theology overcame all the difficulty of reconciling faith and science and today has established this in its theological method and doctrine, since St.: *Fides Querens Intellectum*, defining the vocation of the theologian until today, as St. J. Paul II reaffirms: “*Service to doctrine, which implies the believer’s search for an understanding of faith, that is, theology*”. (JOÃO PAULO II, 1987, nº 1), that is, she managed to stay in history.

## REFERENCES

- BERARDINO, Angelo Di. **Dicionário Patrístico e de Antiguidades Cristãs**. 5ª edição. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2002.
- BÍBLIA – **Bíblia de Jerusalém**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2002.
- CRUZ, Eduardo Rodrigues da. **Teologia e Ciência no Vaticano II**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2016.
- Decreto **Optatam Totius**. In: Documentos do Concílio Vaticano II: constituições, decretos, declarações. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1966.
- GILSON, Étienne. **Introdução ao Estudo de Santo Agostinho**. 2ª edição. São Paulo: Paulus, 2007.
- HOORNAERT, Eduardo. **Origens do Cristianismo**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2016.
- JOÃO PAULO II, Papa. Carta apostólica **Fides es Ratio**: sobre as relações entre fé e razão. São Paulo: Loyola 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Instrução **Donum vitae** (Sobre o respeito à vida humana nascente e a dignidade da procriação). São Paulo: Loyola, 1987.
- LIÃO, Irineu de. **Contra as Heresias**. São Paulo: Paulus, 1995.
- NICOLAS, Marie Joseph. **Introdução à Suma Teológica**. In: TOMÁS DE AQUINO. Suma teológica. Trad. Pe. Gabriel C. Galache, SJ e Pe. Fidel García Rodríguez, SJ (Dir.). São Paulo: Edições Loyola, 2003.
- PENIDO, Maurício Teixeira Leite. **Iniciação Teológica** (O mistério da Igreja) vol. I. Petrópolis: Vozes, 1956.
- PERNOUD, Régine. **Luz sobre a Idade Média**. Coleção Estudos e Documentos. Editora: Publicações Europa-América, 1981.
- RATZINGER, Joseph. **Natureza e Missão da Teologia**. 2ª edição. Petrópolis: Vozes, 2012.
- ZILLES, Urbano. **Fé e Razão: no mundo da tecnociência**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2021.
- \_\_\_\_\_. **Desafios atuais para a Teologia**. São Paulo: Paulus, 2020.