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— Michael Downey, editor of *The New Dictionary of Catholic Spirituality*

Systematic Theology

A Roman Catholic Approach

Thomas P. Rausch, SJ



A Michael Glazier Book

LITURGICAL PRESS
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Cover design by Jodi Hendrickson. Image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons. Peter Lombard, *Sententiae (The Sentences)*, Bibliotheque Municipale at Troyes MS900, fol. 1r.

On the cover is Peter Lombard (1096–1169), a scholastic theologian at Notre Dame in Paris. His *Four Books of the Sentences* could be considered one of the first comprehensive texts on systematic theology. University students prepared commentaries on its overview of Christian doctrine down to the sixteenth century.

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For my graduate students

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Thomas P. Rausch, SJ
Loyola Marymount University

Abbreviations

Documents of Vatican II

- AG *Ad Gentes*: Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church
- DH *Dignitatis Humanae*: Declaration on Religious Freedom
- DV *Dei Verbum*: Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation
- GS *Gaudium et Spes*: Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World
- LG *Lumen Gentium*: Dogmatic Constitution on the Church
- NA *Nostra Aetate*: Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions
- SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium*: Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
- UR *Unitatis Redintegratio*: Decree on Ecumenism

Other

- CDF Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
- ITC International Theological Commission
- CIC *Codex Juris Canonici*
- DI *Dominus Iesus*
- DS Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 33rd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1965).
- WCC World Council of Churches

Introduction

How does one characterize Roman Catholic theology? In his study, *Catholicism*, itself a work of systematic theology, the late Richard McBrien describes Catholicism as having a philosophical focus rooted in a Christian realism and three theological foci: sacramentality, mediation, and communion.¹

Its philosophical focus rejects both idealism and naïve realism. Idealism limits knowledge to the phenomena perceived by the senses; ultimate reality remains unknowable. Naïve realism is a common sense approach that reduces knowledge to what appears at first glance, ignoring the capacity of intelligence to discover the intelligibility in the data and to form explanatory concepts. This includes a biblical or doctrinal fundamentalism which takes a text literally, without examining conditioning factors such as language, literary form, or historical context. Thus Catholicism's philosophical focus is concerned with a critical realism.

Theological foci include sacramentality, mediation, and communion. Sacramentality sees material realities, whether nature, art, symbol, story, or persons as able to mediate or bring about an encounter with the transcendent mystery of God. Mediation, a corollary of sacramentality, serves as a bridge to join or bring about some effect. Just as Jesus mediates God's grace to humankind, sacramentality not only symbolizes that grace but also makes it effective in our lives. In a secondary sense, God's grace is mediated by the church as well

¹ Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 1192–99.

as by human kindness, compassion, and care for the other. Communion expresses the idea that Catholicism is essentially a communal experience of Christian faith; it always takes the social seriously. Rejecting a radical individualism, it recognizes that we are essentially social beings who need community to survive and flourish. To be “in Christ” is to be in his body, the church.

A Catholic systematic theology should always be informed by these markers of Catholic identity: a critical realism, an appreciation of sacramentality which lights up the world with traces of the divine, mediation which ennobles both creation and human agency, and communion, underlining Catholicism’s deep sense for the importance of community and the union with God and all people to which we are called.

This communal dimension of Catholic theology coincides well with the recent efforts of Pope Francis to shift from an understanding of Catholic life focused on doctrine to one that sees pastoral care as the center of the church’s life. As he puts it, realities are more important than ideas.² Catholic theology, with its stress on a gracious God who respects human freedom and is constantly reaching out to creation, its sense that human nature even if flawed is also graced, its conviction that grace builds on the human, and its conviction that faith and reason must work in harmony undergirds rather than displaces a greater emphasis on the church’s pastoral mission.

A word on structuring a systematic theology. Thomas Aquinas divided his classic *Summa Theologica* into three parts. The First Part (*Prima Pars*) treats the one God and God’s trinitarian nature, then creation, the angels, and the human person. The Second Part, divided into two parts (*Prima Secundae*, *Secunda Secundae*) considers human acts, general principles of morality, morality in particular, and the virtues. The Third Part (*Tertia Pars*) which remained unfinished takes up the person and work of Christ, the sacraments, and the last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Thus there is a cyclic movement from God to humankind and then through Christ back to God.

² Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Apostolic Exhortation on the Joy of the Gospel, no. 231, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html.

The present work follows that basic structure but with some differences. The first two chapters deal with the nature and changing contexts of theology. The next two focus on the divine mystery, the Trinity, and Jesus the Christ, including his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God. The next three chapters focus on humankind in relation to God. One treats revelation and faith; the next deals with sin, grace, and the human person; the third looks at how grace as a share in the divine life becomes fruitful in the lives of human beings, and more specifically, Mary and the saints. The next three chapters treat the church and the sacraments, while the final chapter treats creation and eschatology, bringing God's creative work to its ultimate fulfillment or what might be described as the fullness of salvation. If there is an overarching theme, it is mission, the mission of the church as a share in the mission of the Word and Spirit in the world. Thus systematic theology describes how God's grace moves from eternity into space and time, gathering creation into the fullness of the divine mystery.

This volume is not intended to be encyclopedic; it is a modest effort to construct a systematic theology alert to the pluralism of contemporary theology. It cannot explore in depth all the issues raised by cultural and methodological shifts today, for example postcolonial, feminist, queer, eco-theology, and comparative theology, though it will consider them briefly. The intention is to present a text that is relatively concise and mainstream, an introduction to explore basic themes in Catholic systematic theology from a biblical, historical and contemporary perspective, though always aware of today's theological pluralism. A manageable text also makes possible the inclusion of other articles and texts that might expand on any particular topic. Each chapter includes recommended readings for further study.

Chapter 1

Systematic Theology

The English word “theology” is derived from the Greek *theologia*, which in turn comes from two Greek words, *theos* (God), and *logia* (words, utterances, or speech). Thus theology can be translated as talking about God. Plato used it in this sense in the fourth century BCE in his classic work, *The Republic*.¹ The classic Christian definition of theology comes from Anselm of Canterbury (d. 1109), who said that theology was *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding.

The Nature of Theology

What is important about Anselm’s definition is that it underlines that theology in the Christian tradition is always a critical reflection on the faith of the community, an effort to bring the faith-experience of God and God’s grace to expression, clarity, and deeper understanding. It means asking questions, probing more deeply into our beliefs, trying to bring our sense for God and God’s graciousness toward us to more adequate levels of expression.

The emphasis on faith, received and handed on is what distinguishes theology from religious studies; it is a confessional approach. To do theology is to stand within a faith tradition and reflect on it critically. Religious studies means studying the same from outside—so to speak—as one might study sixteenth-century English literature

¹ Plato, *Republic* 2.18.

or German history. There is no personal investment. As Pope John Paul I reportedly said: “Theologians talk a lot about God. I wonder how often they talk to God.” Several points about Christian theology are important.

First, theology, even when done by individuals, is always rooted in the community of faith. The Christian theologian reflects on the faith received and to which he or she remains committed. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, revelation is always to a people, to Israel, to the disciples of Jesus, to the church. Thus theology implies a knowledge that is more personal than objective, for God is not an object, a phenomenon, or a behavioral pattern like the objects studied by the empirical or social sciences; God is a subject, whose self-disclosure is always free and intersubjective. While individuals often play important roles—for example, one thinks of the dominating presence of Moses in the Pentateuch, the importance of the prophets, and of course Jesus—their teaching always arises out of the experience of the people of which they are a part and to which they remain bound. It cannot be reduced to something entirely subjective and individual.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, God’s self-disclosure is always mediated communally by the people of Israel and later by the community of the church, with its Scriptures, its sacraments, and its apostolic ministry. Thus Karl Rahner defined theology as “the conscious and methodological explanation and explication of the divine revelation received and grasped in faith,”² while Karl Barth, the premier Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, called his multivolume work *Church Dogmatics*. Theology is a work of the church.

Second, theology is always a second-order language, removed by several levels of abstraction, metaphor, or analogy from the faith experience to which it gives rise. What the first disciples of Jesus experienced in their encounter with Jesus was healing, forgiveness, freedom, reconciliation, and new life—in a word, salvation. When Paul, perhaps the first Christian theologian, attempted to describe the meaning of the Christ event to others, he used terms rooted in his Jewish imagination and hallowed by use in his Jewish tradition, terms such as justification, reconciliation, expiation, salvation, re-

² Karl Rahner, “Theology,” in *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, ed. Karl Rahner (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 1687.

demption, freedom, sanctification, transformation, new creation, and glorification.³ Similarly, the medieval church adopted the language of transubstantiation in an effort to safeguard its eucharistic faith in Christ's presence in the Eucharist. But this philosophical language, using the categories of Aristotle and the notion of a change of substance, was considerably removed from the experience of the first Christians who recognized the presence of the risen Jesus in the meal (1 Cor 10:16-17; Luke 24:31, 35).

Third, theology is always contextual; it represents an effort to reflect on the Gospel message in a particular historical situation or context. A criterion of the adequacy of a theological statement is its ability to speak to the concerns of contemporary people. As Karl Rahner once said, all theology is pastoral. For example, liberation theology speaks to this concern for context with its emphasis on praxis.

Finally, theology is a critical discipline, a science with its own methods and "specialties," even if different from the empirical sciences. It seeks always to reflect on the church's language, to refine it so that it might more adequately proclaim and express the good news of the Gospel in the various cultures and different historical contexts in which the church is living. Often it must distinguish between popular belief or theological opinion and the church's official teaching, and sometimes it helps to amend that teaching.

Theological Disciplines

In his important work *Method in Theology*, Bernard Lonergan lists eight functional specialties, referring to different moments in the doing of theology.⁴ A traditional division of the theological disciplines has included fundamental theology, biblical theology, historical theology, pastoral theology, and systematic theology, but the divisions are not always precise, and there is often overlap.

Fundamental theology includes natural or philosophical theology, fundamental theology itself, and apologetics. Natural theology asks

³ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Pauline Theology," in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 82.67.

⁴ See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972).

what we can know about the mystery of the divine in light of philosophical reflection; it relies on natural reason, not revelation. Fundamental theology seeks to establish the historical and philosophical grounds for the fundamental doctrines of the faith: God, Christ, the Spirit, the church, and so on. It presupposes revelation. Apologetics, today often considered a part of fundamental theology, at its best seeks to enter into a dialogue with culture by showing the reasonableness of Christian faith and its teaching. Some classic examples of fundamental theology would include Karl Rahner's *Foundations of Christian Faith*, Joseph Ratzinger's *Introduction to Christianity*, Hans Küng's *On Being a Christian*, and Gerald O'Collins's *Fundamental Theology*.

Biblical theology investigates Christianity's sacred writings or "scriptures," thus the story of Israel and the early Christian community, its memory of Jesus and his ministry, and the initial development of its theological language. Scripture obviously is ingredient in all theological disciplines, but there are many different theologies in the Old and New Testaments, and Scripture always needs to be interpreted. Biblical theology's primary concern is the historical meaning of the text, the meaning intended by the biblical author, using the various historical and literary disciplines of the historical-critical method. Catholic theology is also sensitive to the "fuller" sense that emerges as a particular text is reread in the light of the tradition.

Historical theology studies how the church's faith has developed and its theological language has changed in different periods in the church's long history. It includes various subsets—for example, patristic, medieval, reformation, modern, and nineteenth-century theology. Moral theology, often called Christian ethics today, seeks to understand what it means to live life "in Christ," guided by the Holy Spirit. Thus it includes both the personal and social dimensions of Gospel living.

Pastoral theology includes a number of disciplines. Pastoral theology itself seeks to nurture and deepen the practical life of Christians and their communities. Liturgical theology is concerned with the theology and expression of the church's worship. Spirituality examines different ways of expressing a life of prayer, discipleship, Christian service, and growing in the Spirit. Finally, there is systematic theology.

Systematic Theology

Systematic theology, sometimes called constructive theology, dogmatic theology, or systematics (Lonergan), seeks to understand and render more intelligible the central doctrines of the faith and show how they are related to each other. Focusing primarily on theology in the contemporary life of the church, it tries to show how the church's doctrinal tradition grows out of its roots in Scripture and develops in the history of the church; most importantly, it strives to more adequately express and sometimes reinterpret that tradition, always in the interest of better communicating the mystery of salvation and bringing it into a dialogue with culture. Systematic theology is truly evangelical; for this reason it is also concerned with how to relate faith to culture.

First, systematic theology is concerned with understanding the basic doctrines of Christian faith and, thus, the meaning or truth of those doctrines. According to Lonergan, both doctrines and systematics aim at understanding the truth but do so in different ways. "Doctrines aim at a clear and distinct affirmation of religious realities: its principal concern is the truth of such an affirmation. On the other hand, systematics aims at an understanding of the religious realities affirmed by doctrines," though he notes that systematic theology is aware that its understanding remains imperfect, analogous, and no more than probable.⁵ "Doctrines are correlated with judgment, systematics with understanding. Doctrines are affirmations. Systematics attempts to understand what has been affirmed."⁶

Second, systematic theology is concerned with how the basic doctrines of the faith relate to each other. What is the relation between Christology and pneumatology or between the theology of creation and eschatology? Again, Lonergan: "The aim of systematics is to present an 'assimilable whole,' and so a unified understanding of Christian doctrine; but the core meanings that were explicitly affirmed

⁵ Lonergan, *Method*, 349; Lonergan finds this distinction in Aquinas's *Summa Contra Gentiles*, bk. 6; see Lonergan, *Method*, 336–37.

⁶ Robert M. Doran, *What Is Systematic Theology?* (Buffalo, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 8.

by the Christian church in the kairos moments of its self-constitution are to form the core of that synthetic statement."⁷

Finally, systematic theology is comprehensive. In its efforts to understand Christian doctrine, it necessarily incorporates the data of biblical, historical, and doctrinal theology. Perhaps Origen (c. 184–253), who sought in his theology to develop a complete Christian worldview using biblical exegesis, hermeneutics, philosophical theology, and spirituality could be considered the first systematic theologian.

A precursor to the development of systematic theology might be found in the third-century catechetical schools of Alexandria and Antioch, with their different concerns and approaches to affirming both the divinity and humanity of Jesus in an integrated theology. The school at Alexandria was founded in 195 by Clement of Alexandria (d. 215); Origen was its great light. The basic concern of the Alexandrians was the divinity of the Logos, which had in some way entered into or become joined to flesh in the person of Jesus. Believing that human souls preexisted in a world of spiritual beings, Origen taught that the Logos became fused with the soul of Jesus.⁸ Thus Alexandria was clear on the divinity of the Logos, but its way of describing the mystery of the incarnation risked denying the full humanity of Jesus, as later happened with Apollinaris. The school at Antioch, probably founded in the second half of the third century by Lucian of Antioch (d. 312), was concerned with affirming the full humanity of Jesus. To safeguard confession of both his divinity and his humanity, Antioch used the language of “two natures,” divine and human, joined in a substantial (hypostatic) union.

These different approaches have been characterized as word-flesh (Alexandria) and word-man (Antioch). In spite of the rivalry between the two schools, some of it political, their dispute was fundamentally a struggle over theological language that was eventually resolved by the Council of Chalcedon (451).

From these earliest days of the church, Catholic theology has made room for various theologies and schools: Augustinian, Thomistic,

⁷ *Ibid.*, 9; see also Lonergan, *Method*, 162.

⁸ J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1958), 154–55.

Franciscan, and Scotist. At the Council of Trent, the bishops were careful not to canonize one particular theology of justification. As theologian Avery Dulles says, "The Council wished to present a coherent Catholic doctrine that would exclude the errors of the Reformers without condemning the positions of any of the recognized Catholic schools."⁹ In the seventeenth century, Jesuits and Dominicans argued over grace and free will; the twentieth century saw a host of schools that looked to Rahner, Lonergan, or Ratzinger, or to the new theologies of liberation. This pluralism within unity exemplifies what it means to be catholic.

Francis Schüssler Fiorenza points to three classic paradigms within the Western theological tradition, the Augustinian, the Thomistic, and the neoscholastic.¹⁰ Since these schools offer different approaches to the mystery of the divine, and their influence continues to be felt in different ways even today, we should consider each one briefly. We will also consider scholasticism and Baroque scholasticism, which could be seen as transitional stages.

Augustine: Theology as Wisdom

Few have had more influence on theology than Augustine of Hippo (354–430). His epistemology was basically Platonic, envisioning two worlds, one the intelligible world in which truth dwells, the other the sensible world which we perceive by sight and touch.¹¹ Understanding meant moving from the visible to the invisible and intelligible. Most important was his distinction between knowledge (*scientia*) and wisdom (*sapientia*). While knowledge offers rational insight into the visible, changeable, and temporal things of this world, this was not yet wisdom. The object of wisdom is the eternal and unchangeable realities. Knowledge comes from experience, authority, and signs. Experience leads from the visible to the intelligible. Knowledge based on experience is better than that based on human

⁹ Avery Dulles, *The Assurance of Things Hoped For: A Theology of Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 48.

¹⁰ Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Tasks and Methods," in *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives*, ed. Francis Schüssler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 6–22.

¹¹ Augustine, *Contra Academicos* 3.27.37.

authority, but Christ's authority is divine. Signs also contribute to a knowledge that goes beyond direct experience. Some signs are natural, like smoke as a sign of fire. Others are "given" either by humans or by God, as in the words of Scripture which refer to the transcendent, to God.

Scripture, for Augustine, holds the highest authority (*Confessions* 16.1). Scripture witnesses to God's revelation in Christ—the invisible Divine Wisdom become visible—and to Christ's authority. Scripture is interpreted not only in its literal or historical sense but also in reference to the transcendent. The task of biblical scholars is to interpret the signs that point to divine truth. But the authority of Scripture is an "interpreted authority," effective "only as it is extended into the interpreting community of the Church through the rule of faith."¹² In Catholic terms, Scripture does not stand alone.

There is a voluntarist dimension to Augustine's epistemology, especially to his view on how we know the transcendent. In the search for truth, the will has a certain primacy over the understanding. "What is known cannot be divorced from what is loved."¹³ To know the truth one must love the truth and believe in what God has revealed. This is very different from the intellectualism of Aristotle's epistemology as well as the "objective" approach of contemporary scientific method. In the Prologue to Book 15 of his treatise on the Trinity, Augustine quotes from the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 7:9: "Unless you believe you shall not understand."¹⁴ In Schüssler Fiorenza's words, "Knowing the eternal reality requires a spiritual ascent and purification. Such a spiritual purification is, therefore, a presupposition for interpreting Scripture."¹⁵

Augustine's influence was to play an enormous role in the development of theology in the Western church. The doctrine of the Trinity, original sin and grace, thus theological anthropology, the church, and

¹² See Howard J. Loewen, "The Use of Scripture in Augustine's Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981): 207.

¹³ Robert E. Cushman, "Faith and Reason," in *A Companion to the Study of St. Augustine*, ed. Roy W. Battenhouse (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 289.

¹⁴ Augustine, *The Trinity* 15.2, trans. Edmund Hill (Brooklyn, NY: New City Press, 1991), 395.

¹⁵ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology," 10; see also Loewen, "Scripture in Augustine's Theology," 218–19.

the efficacy of the sacraments all were important themes in his work. The Reformers, especially Luther and Calvin, were deeply influenced by Augustine's understanding of original sin. His distinction between the reality (*res*) and signs (*signa*) of Christian doctrine and the order of his treatment influenced the medieval *summas*. Joseph Ratzinger could stand as an example of a contemporary Augustinian.

Scholastic Theology: Theology in the Universities

For much of the twelfth century, theology was still basically Augustinian. Taught in the monasteries and the ecclesiastical schools, with Scripture being the primary text, the discipline was called *sacra doctrina*, sacred doctrine, or sometimes *sacra pagina*. In the schools of the twelfth century, the forms of instruction were the *lectio*, *disputatio*, and *praedicatio*, a reading, debate, and sermon focused on the text of Scripture.¹⁶ But with the development of the universities in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, *sacra doctrina* began to undergo a transformation into what became known as scholastic theology, a discipline done by the *magistri* (masters) or "scholastics" as they were called, men of the "schools" who were the university professors. The *magistri*, with a *licentia docendi* (license to teach), were authoritative interpreters of revelation.¹⁷

Two theologians played an important role in the development of theology from a spiritual to a more critical discipline, Peter Abelard (1079–1142) and his student Peter Lombard (1096–1164). Abelard's book *Sic et Non* (yes and no) was a compilation of passages from the church fathers on Christian doctrine and life, not all in agreement with each other. Under his influence, the *disputatio*, an examination of a topic approached in the form of a particular *quaestio* or question, became increasingly a vigorous academic debate. Various positions or objections from different authorities would be brought forth under the *sed contra*, the "on the contrary," in the effort to arrive at an agreed

¹⁶ Ulrich G. Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 122.

¹⁷ Marie-Dominique Chenu, *Nature, Man, and Society in the Twelfth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 274–76.

upon understanding. By bringing these differences in opinion and approach into view, Abelard was working toward common understanding and agreement, thus, toward a more critical theology. As Chenu says, “The criteria of truth were no longer based solely on the rule of faith as operative in the revealed texts but also upon the rational coherence of propositions taken from a philosophy of man and here used as the minor premises of syllogisms.”¹⁸

In the thirteenth century, the mendicant orders, the Dominicans and Franciscans, began to establish themselves at the universities, arriving in Paris as early as 1217, originally to form houses of study for their own younger members. They tended to emphasize biblical exegesis. But others were increasingly emphasizing the *Four Books of Sentences* of Peter Lombard as a systematic work, another compilation of biblical texts with passages from the fathers and medieval thinkers. Like Augustine, it moved from the Trinity to creation, to Christ and the virtues, and then to the signs or sacraments. Before long, the *magistri* were lecturing less on the Bible, taking instead the *Sentences*. It became the standard textbook for theology in the medieval universities. Even Luther and Calvin commented on it.

The status of theology as a university discipline, however, was not yet clear. Was it a science distinct from *sacra doctrina*, the interpretation of Scripture? How was it related to the other sciences? The introduction of Aristotle, already available in translation since the mid-twelfth century, was to play a role in this controversy. By the thirteenth century, Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*, with its concept of science based on experience, logical demonstration (the syllogism), and self-evident principles was widely accepted. This not only played an important role in the developing Western understanding of science but also provided a new model for theology. In the university, theology was becoming a science in the Aristotelian sense.¹⁹

Thomas Aquinas: Theology as a Science

The Dominican Albert the Great (1200–1280) was one of the first to incorporate this Aristotelian perspective into the doing of theology.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 288.

¹⁹ Leinsle, *Introduction to Scholastic Theology*, 122.

But it was his student, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) who from early in his career worked to place *sacra doctrina* or theology as a distinct science alongside philosophy and the natural sciences. The introduction of Aristotle was opposed by both the church and the university, with the Franciscan Bonaventure—who held fast to an Augustinian epistemology—leading the resistance. Bonaventure rejected the idea of a self-sufficient philosophy. Since Christ was the center of all things, philosophy had to be radically Christian and christological. But by 1255, the curriculum included the entire Aristotelian corpus.

While there remains considerable controversy about how Thomas understood *sacra doctrina*, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, he located it as a distinct science (*scientia*) alongside philosophy, using Aristotle’s distinction of two kinds of science, one based on principles of natural reason such as mathematics or geometry, the other proceeding from a superior knowledge, what Aristotle called a subaltern (or subordinate) science. *Sacra doctrina* was such a subaltern science based on what God has revealed, on revelation. Thus faith was involved, for faith gives the Christian both certainty and participation in divine knowledge. Since *sacra doctrina* had its origin in revelation, its primary authority was Scripture. But scholastic theology also recognized the work of commentators who were themselves recognized as authorities, as did Thomas. He also distinguished between the magisterium of the doctors or theologians and the pastoral magisterium of the bishops, thus between a magisterium based on scholarship and another based on office.

Sacra doctrina also had a hermeneutical task—to interpret a prescientific faith. Philosophy could help in the understanding of the truths of faith, but it could not demonstrate them, since they were based on revelation. Its authority was limited. As the *magistri*, the professors of the day, increasingly focused on the disputed questions instead of the texts of the Scriptures, exegesis of the *lectio* gave way to the *quaestiones* and the *disputatio*. The *magistri* often collected their questions into a *summa*, which developed from simple collections to a rational ordering of the truths of revelation. The discipline was increasingly identified by the term theology, a term used since Anselm in the sense of an ordered body of knowledge about God. As it focused less on authority and more on dialectics and disputation, theology was becoming a critical discipline.

Baroque Scholasticism

While medieval scholastic theology had known a diversity of schools, in the modern period the *Summa Theologica* of Aquinas replaced the *Sentences* of Peter Lombard as the basic theological text. But controversies between the councils and the papacy as well as between the papacy and the universities as well as those caused by the Reformation and the Renaissance led to a multiplication of theological authorities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the period known as Baroque Scholasticism. Typical was Melchior Cano's (1509–1560) *De locis theologicis*, listing ten sources of theological authority, including oral tradition, councils, and the Roman church, and with an emphasis on the importance of historical sources. Characteristic of this period were commentaries on the *Summa* of Thomas. The works of Robert Bellarmine and Francis Suarez were also significant.

The work of Parisian theologian Denis Petau (1583–1652), a French Jesuit also known as Petavius, sought to establish the scientific character of theology by employing a process of reasoning that deduced theological conclusions from the certain principles of faith using the syllogism. His deductive method was to shape neoscholastic theology. But he was also the first to attempt a study of Christian doctrine from a historical perspective.

Neoscholasticism

The neoscholasticism that emerged in the nineteenth century presented a Catholic theology that had become a far less creative discipline. Much of it was polemical and apologetic; it sought to clarify church teaching and defend it against the teachings of the Protestants. It took its point of departure not from Scripture like the Protestants but from church teaching, which it held to be the proximate rule of faith. The *quaestio* of medieval theology was replaced by the thesis, to be defended and proved by appeals to church authority. Passages from Scripture or the fathers were reduced to proof texts; investigation had become demonstration. Rather than prizing historical research into the sources, its approach was abstract and ahistorical, influenced by the Cartesian ideal of clear and distinct ideas and Petau's deductive method. Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (1879) sought to ensure that all those preparing for the priesthood

would study Thomistic philosophy, though it was really a neo-thomism.

Leinsle summarizes neoscholasticism's approach as idealizing the thirteenth century, subjecting not just theology but also philosophy to the magisterium, rejecting Protestant theology for not conforming to magisterial teaching, and emphasizing a strict distinction between the natural and the supernatural orders. At the same time, it did inspire some research into medieval philosophy and theology.²⁰ Neoscholasticism's characteristic work was the manual, a textbook used mostly in seminaries. The result was what became known as the "textbook theology" of seminaries and the Roman schools.

A classic example, referred to simply as "Denzinger," is the *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum*, a collection of the decrees, definitions, and canons of the councils, condemned propositions, and papal declarations compiled by Heinrich Joseph Dominicus Denzinger (1819–1883). The most recent edition, prepared by Adolf Schönmetzer in 1963, is referred to by the abbreviation DS, for Denzinger-Schönmetzer. Theology done in the neoscholastic mode too often resolved questions by citing the appropriate DS numbers, that is, by appealing to church authority, though the work remains an important compendium of church teachings.

Joseph Ratzinger once characterized the theology of the first half of the twentieth century as living inside the box of neoscholasticism; it had a greater certainty and logical lucidity than today's theology but was "far removed from the real world."²¹ It was still present in many of the initial texts drafted by the Theological Commission for the Second Vatican Council. For example, Yves Congar criticized the first draft's chapter on the laity for being very much in the scholastic mode, like "chapters from a good manual." Largely a summary of papal documents, the source of its teaching "is never the Word of God; it is the Church herself, and even the Church reduced to the pope." And there was nothing ecumenical about the text.²²

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 359.

²¹ 30 *Dias* (April 1994): 62, http://www.traditioninaction.org/ProgressivistDoc/A_018_RatzingerScholasticism.htm.

²² Yves Congar, *My Journal of the Council* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2012), 47.

Counter Currents

There were some significant counter currents to the neoscholastic dominance. One came out of the Catholic faculty of theology at Tübingen in Germany. The work of John Henry Newman represented another. The Transcendental Thomists, influenced by Blondel, sought to enter into a dialogue with modern philosophy. There was also the *ressourcement* movement. Based largely in France, it was commonly called the “*nouvelle théologie*” before Vatican II.

Tübingen School

The Catholic Tübingen School, founded by Johann Sebastian von Drey (1777–1853), began as a reaction to the rationalism of the Enlightenment.²³ Most important to Drey was his understanding of history and the historical method. Ecclesiology was a particular focus—not the juridical ecclesiology of the nineteenth century, but the church as a spiritual community formed by the biblical idea of the kingdom of God. For Drey, God’s progressive, historical revelation of the kingdom of God reaches its definitive communication in the Catholic Church. His student Johann Adam Möhler (1796–1838) completed his studies at Tübingen and became one of its most distinguished graduates. Both Möhler and Drey saw how the new emphasis on history, including the historical nature of theological statements, could aid in the understanding of revelation.

Möhler’s great works (in English) were *The Unity of the Church* (1825), *Athanasius the Great* (1827), and *Symbolism, or the Exposition of Doctrinal Difference* (1844). He took seriously the notion of doctrinal development and saw tradition itself as developing. In *Symbolism*, perhaps his most influential work, he studied doctrinal differences between Catholics and Protestants. Understanding symbols as the confessional statements of the different communities, he made the important distinction between the substance of a doctrine and its historical form. His ecclesiology also took seriously the work of the Holy Spirit. He understood the church not as a juridical society, as in neoscholasticism, but as the body of Christ.

²³ See *The Legacy of the Tübingen School*, ed. Donald J. Dietrich and Michael J. Himes (New York: Crossroad, 1997).

In his earlier works, Möhler focused on the pre-Nicene church, which seemed to be more open to the Spirit's influence, though in his later works he shifted to a word-centered, incarnational ecclesiology. His incarnational approach and emphasis on ecclesial communion anticipated the *ressourcement* movement which developed in the next century just as his organic ecclesiology was to help decenter Bellarmine's juridical model. Today, in spite of his strong commitment to the Roman Catholic doctrinal tradition, his work is recognized as an attempt to mediate between the Catholic and Protestant traditions.

John Henry Newman

Another theologian who took history seriously and provided an alternative vision to the narrow dogmatic orthodoxy of Roman neoscholasticism was John Henry Newman (1801–1890).²⁴ Born into an Anglican family and educated at Oxford in the Greek and Latin classics, Newman was ordained an Anglican priest in 1825. Newman's view of faith was personalist rather than propositional, rooted in a relationship with the God revealed in Jesus. While dogma was important, it was secondary to the divine mystery to which dogmatic truths were to serve as a guide. His book *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) was a classic, the fruit of his long involvement with the Oxford Movement and the personal struggle that led him into the Catholic Church. Newman was perhaps the first to systematically treat the development of doctrine. Especially significant was his maintaining the right of the laity to be consulted in matters of faith, using the example of the fourth-century Arian crisis in which many of the bishops were Arian and the faith was kept by the laity. Newman also struggled for years with various Roman congregations that remained suspicious of his orthodoxy. Thus he remains a figure with much to teach the church of today.

Transcendental Thomism

At the beginning of the twentieth century, some Catholic scholars sought a path beyond neoscholasticism by placing an emphasis on

²⁴ John R. Connolly, *John Henry Newman: A View of Catholic Faith for the New Millennium* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005).

human experience, using the intellectualism of Thomas. Like Kant, Jesuits Pierre Rousselot (1878–1915) and Joseph Maréchal (1878–1944) turned to the human subject and the transcendental reach of consciousness. Both saw the dynamism of human understanding as disclosing far more than the object known. They sought to overcome the neoscholastic split between nature and the supernatural by showing that the supernatural was grounded in the natural.²⁵

Rousselot worked to reinterpret Aquinas by studying his intellectualism. Like Thomas, Rousselot distinguished between intellect (*intellectus*) and reason (*ratio*). While discursive reason was important, giving us knowledge of the world, concepts, science, and symbols, he identified the intellect as an intuitive faculty inclined toward the “First Truth,” God, an inclination or appetite he found in all things. Maréchal’s great work was his five-volume *Le Point de départ de la métaphysique*. In the fifth volume, he argued that Kant had erred by not following the reach of reason beyond the natural realm to the intimations of the Absolute that it disclosed. The dynamism of human understanding showed a desire to move beyond the objects known, beyond finite existence, to unlimited Being as such, the existence of which was the *a priori* condition of possibility for every speculative judgment.²⁶ Maréchal’s influence on Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan was considerable.

Nouvelle Théologie

The *nouvelle théologie* was a name given to the work of a number of theologians associated with the Saulchoir, the Dominican study center in Paris, and Fourvière, the Jesuit theologate in Lyons in the period from 1935 to 1960. In part, their work was a reaction to the dominance of neoscholasticism, enforced by the anti-Modernist measures put in place after Pope Pius X’s encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* and the decree of the Holy Office, *Lamentabili Sane* (1907). In

²⁵ See Stephen M. Fields, “*Ressourcement* and the Retrieval of Thomism for the Contemporary World,” in *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*, ed. Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 355–58.

²⁶ Gerald A. McCool, *Catholic Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Crossroad, 1977), 256.

part, it represented an effort to overcome the rupture between theology and life and enter into dialogue with contemporary thought. Foremost representatives included Jean Daniélou and Henri de Lubac (both Jesuits), and the Dominicans Yves Congar and Marie-Dominique Chenu. De Lubac, Chenu, and Congar were all influenced by Möhler. Also associated with the movement were Hans Urs von Balthasar, Karl Rahner, Louis Boyer, and Joseph Ratzinger.²⁷

An appreciation for history was central to the work of these theologians. Their method was a *ressourcement*, a French term for a “return to the sources” of Catholic faith and life in the Scriptures, the liturgy, and the fathers of the church. Ecclesiology was a key issue; other topics included the development of doctrine, creation and evolution, original sin and grace, and the Eucharist. De Lubac’s *Le surnaturel* was an attempt to overcome the separation between the natural and the supernatural that had ruled Catholic theology since the controversy with Baius and Jansenius in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Congar wrote on the nature of tradition, church reform, the theology of the laity, and ecumenism. Chenu compared changes in thirteenth-century society and church to those in the twentieth century.

The term *nouvelle théologie* was apparently used for the first time, pejoratively, by the Holy Office’s Msgr. Pietro Parente in February 1942 in an article in the *L’Osservatore Romano*, the official Vatican newspaper, though the theologians themselves did not consider their theology as really new. But because it was biblical and historical rather than neoscholastic, it was seen as a threat to Roman orthodoxy. After *Humani Generis* (1950), the encyclical of Pope Pius XII condemning methods that departed from neoscholasticism, a number of these theologians “were removed from their professorial chairs, prevented from upholding their views in lectures or writings, condemned to silence and inactivity.”²⁸

But theology was already changing. The church’s traditional emphasis on neoscholasticism had already given way to the work of

²⁷ Hans Boersma, *Nouvelle Théologie and Sacramental Ontology: A Return to Mystery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11.

²⁸ Carlo Falconi, *The Popes in the Twentieth Century* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967), 283.

theologians whose work would so enrich the Second Vatican Council. Among them were Karl Rahner, Edward Schillebeeckx, Joseph Ratzinger, Hans Küng, and especially the *ressourcement* theologians we have been considering. Their work, along with the work of scholars in the modern biblical movement and the liturgical movement, both cautiously embraced by Pope Pius XII, was to be vindicated at the council.

Contemporary Theology

In the days after Vatican II, Catholic theology, reenergized by the council, underwent a further transformation. First, the locus for theological reflection changed, as theology began moving out of seminaries and into universities and graduate schools. Second, it would no longer be done chiefly by priests. The council's document *Gaudium et Spes* had encouraged the laity to receive "a sufficient formation in the sacred sciences" and expressed the hope "that some will dedicate themselves professionally to these studies," along with affirming that "all the faithful, whether clerics or laity, possess a lawful freedom of inquiry, freedom of thought and of expressing their mind with humility and fortitude in those matters on which they enjoy competence" (GS 62). In response, Marquette University established the first doctoral program open to laymen and women in 1963, and other universities quickly followed suit. Before long, laymen and especially laywomen were graduating with doctoral degrees and began moving into universities and graduate schools. As Catholic theology underwent a simultaneous declericalization and laicization, it began to develop new methodologies and approaches.

Transcendental Theology

As noted earlier, Joseph Maréchal's Transcendental Thomism was an effort to bring theology into dialogue with modern philosophy, particularly Kant, by analyzing the conditions for the transcendental reach of human understanding. The premiere example of Transcendental Thomism in contemporary theology is the work of Karl Rahner, who adopted Schleiermacher's transcendental point of departure.

His theological anthropology, drawing on both Aquinas and Heidegger, describes the human person as a radical openness to transcendence, grasped non-thematically in every act of knowing, and thus, as an openness toward God and the possibility of God's self-communication. Rahner's classic text is his *Grundkurs* or *Foundations of Christian Faith*, a modern day *Summa*.²⁹

Liberation Theology

Arising out of the postconciliar ferment in Latin America, liberation theology developed as a radically contextual theology, rooted in the social *realidad* of the often oppressive Latin American societies. Its key figures were the Uruguayan Jesuit Juan Luis Segundo, who even before Vatican II was calling for the church to address the poverty and injustice of so much of the continent, the Peruvian Gustavo Gutiérrez, whose book *A Theology of Liberation* is its most famous text, and the German Johann Baptist Metz, who began asking after the Second World War how it was possible for German Christians to continue their untroubled believing and praying during the war, singing Gregorian chant with their backs to Auschwitz.³⁰ Metz broke with the Transcendental Thomism of his mentor Karl Rahner to develop what became known as political theology. Gutiérrez defined theology as "a critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word."³¹

With this emphasis on praxis, liberation theology takes as its starting point an analysis of the concrete sociopolitical situation in which the Gospel is actually being lived and that which frustrates the embodiment of Gospel values. Theology should be done from the side of the oppressed with liberation as a goal. What do the Scriptures have to say about salvation in the real lives of a people? Jon Sobrino describes the task of liberation theology as a reflection on praxis, its *locus theologicus* as the poor of this world, and its goal "taking the

²⁹ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: Seabury Press, 1978).

³⁰ Johann Baptist Metz, *The Emergent Church* (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 27.

³¹ Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973), 13.

crucified peoples down from the cross,” a phrase he borrowed from Ignacio Ellacuría. Sobrino emphasizes the historical Jesus, the church of the poor, martyrdom, and salvation as liberation from all oppression, always in the context of the reign of God.³²

The fact that liberation theologians often used a Marxist hermeneutic made the movement suspect in Rome, especially with Polish Pope John Paul II, whose experience of communism was anything but positive. Latin American liberation theology was the first of many contextual theologies of liberation—black, Hispanic, Asian, gay or “queer,” or feminist, the last further divided into “*mujerista*” (Hispanic) or “womanist” (African American) theologies.³³

Analytical Approaches

Francis Schüssler Fiorenza outlines two types of analytical approaches, one using an epistemological metatheory as a basic method and another using models and paradigms for theological reflection. As an example of metatheory, he takes Lonergan’s study of human understanding, *Insight*, as well as his understanding of critical realism as a transition from a classical Aristotelian understanding of scientific method to a modern empirical method.³⁴ His metatheory includes an analysis of the intentionality of conversion as multidimensional—intellectual, moral, religious, and some add affective or psychic (Robert Doran)—and the biases that can introduce a blindness (scotoma) on any of these levels. His emphasis on modern empirical method has been adopted by theologians such as Roger Haight and Paul Lakeland, who seek to do ecclesiology “from below,” an inductive or empirical ecclesiology.³⁵

³² Jon Sobrino, preface to *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, ed. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), ix–x, at ix.

³³ Alfred T. Hennelly, *Liberation Theologies: The Global Pursuit of Justice* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1995).

³⁴ Schüssler Fiorenza, “Systematic Theology,” 36–40; I am dependent on Schüssler Fiorenza’s analysis for what follows. See also Bernard Lonergan, *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1957).

³⁵ Roger Haight, *Christian Community in History*, vol. 1, *Historical Ecclesiology* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 4–14; Paul Lakeland, *Church: Living Communion, Engaging Theology: Catholic Perspectives* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 120–23.

The use of models in theology was pioneered by Avery Dulles, who adapted the concept of models or paradigms from the physical and social sciences in his classic *Models of the Church*, returning to it again in *Models of Revelation*.³⁶ For example, he described the church as institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant, later adding community of disciples, while using the models of doctrine, history, inner experience, dialectical presence, or new awareness as different ways of characterizing revelation. Priesthood can be understood on the basis of a sacerdotal, community leadership, or representative model. Each model concretized an approach in imaginative and theological terms, leading to comparative appreciations and deeper understandings. Similarly, theological analysis can proceed using diverse categories. Christology can be described in ontological or functional terms; original sin may be described as an ontological, existential, or social reality.

Method of Correlation

Much of modern theology traces its roots to Friedrich Schleiermacher's starting point in human experience. To mediate between this and a more traditional starting point in Scripture, German Protestant theology in the mid-nineteenth century developed a "mediation theology" (*Vermittlungstheologie*) to mediate between science and faith as well as Scripture and reason. Paul Tillich's further development of this method led to its wide acceptance by many Roman Catholic theologians. Hans Küng used it to show the critical relation between the historical Jesus and the present. Edward Schillebeeckx looks at the correlation between the experiences of the tradition and present-day experiences, sometimes bringing about a critical confrontation. Rosemary Radford Ruether brings about a correlation between feminist perspectives and the prophetic principle, using the latter to critique whatever in the Bible might privilege one social group over another. David Tracy seeks a critical correlation between an interpretation of the Christian tradition and an interpretation of

³⁶ Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1974); Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).

the contemporary situation, appealing to mutually critical correlations between two sets of interpretations.³⁷ What is common to these theologies of correlation is the emphasis on experience, the fruit of modernity's "turn toward the subject."

Roger Haight has pointed to three important dimensions or "gifts" of American intellectual culture to the world church; they include a feminist perspective, openness to pluralism, and the rise of the laity.³⁸ In the area of ecclesiology especially, an emphasis on experience means an attention to ethnography, that is, direct observations of developments or situations. Joseph Ratzinger also does a theology of correlation, without the emphasis on experience, which for him is a product of German Enlightenment thinking. Correlation, for Ratzinger, is between philosophical and theological inquiry, showing how faith illumines reason.

Conclusion

Theology begins with a critical reflection of the church on its faith. Thus it is a communal enterprise, even when it remains bound to the work of individual scholars. Systematic theology seeks a comprehensive understanding of the realities affirmed by faith—God, Jesus, sin, grace, church—and how they relate to each other.

One of the first great theologians in Christian history, Augustine, saw theology as wisdom, the hidden Wisdom of God become visible in Christ and witnessed to by Scripture. Scripture points to transcendent truth and is interpreted in light of the church's rule of faith. Knowing the truth is contingent on loving the truth, which for Augustine gives a certain epistemic priority to will over intellect.

Thomas Aquinas, using the recently introduced work of Aristotle, placed greater emphasis on the intellect in his approach. He saw *sacra doctrina* as a distinct science alongside philosophy; in the university

³⁷ Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology," 41–46.

³⁸ Roger Haight, "The American Jesuit Theologian," in *Jesuit Postmodern: Scholarship, Vocation, and Identity in the 21st Century*, ed. Francis X. Clooney (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), 98.

it was increasingly called theology. Part of its task was to interpret a prescientific faith, and as the *magistri* increasingly turned from commentaries on Scripture to the opinions of the authorities listed in Lombard's *Sentences*, using the *disputatio* to examine disputed questions, theology was becoming an increasingly critical science.

In the centuries following the High Middle Ages, Catholic theology seemed to freeze into Baroque or neoscholastic forms. Aside from some significant commentaries, it became an increasingly ahistorical and deductive discipline, looking not to Scripture but primarily to church authority. But there were some exceptions. A new appreciation for history was evident in von Drey and Möhler at Tübingen in Germany, Cardinal John Henry Newman in England, and especially the *ressourcement* theologians in France. At the same time, the Transcendental Thomists sought to begin a dialogue with modern philosophy and Thomas by investigating the transcendental reach of human understanding.

One result of this history is that the relation between theology and Scripture has taken different forms. With Augustine, Scripture was testimony to the Divine Wisdom become visible in Christ. The task of theology was to interpret the text and the transcendent wisdom to which it referred. The primary method was the commentary (*lectio*). With Aquinas and his distinction between faith knowledge, based on Scripture, and scientific knowledge, theology became more critical, using the *disputatio* and arguing not only from the text but also from authorities. Still, Scripture remained the primary rule of faith. But under the influence of scholasticism, especially after the Reformation and its appeal to *sola Scriptura*, Catholic theology increasingly appealed to church teaching as the primary authority for Catholic theology, with Scripture used as a proof text.

The modern biblical movement gradually restored Scripture to its rightful place. Pope Pius XII's encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu* (1943) gave Catholic scholars freedom to use modern historical-critical methods, leading to a renewal of biblical scholarship within the church. *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Divine Revelation, reaffirmed the central place of Scripture in the church's life and its place as the foundation for theology, along with tradition (no. 24). But contemporary theology, both Protestant and Catholic, too often risks ignoring the revelatory character of Scripture, reducing

it to one more historical source,³⁹ rather than interpreting it within the life of the church and its living tradition.⁴⁰

If Catholic theology has rediscovered the importance of Scripture, its task has become even more complex as the intellectual climate of the West changed, with modernity giving way to postmodernism and theology becoming increasingly contextual, pluralistic, and post-colonial. We will consider these changes in the following chapter.

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