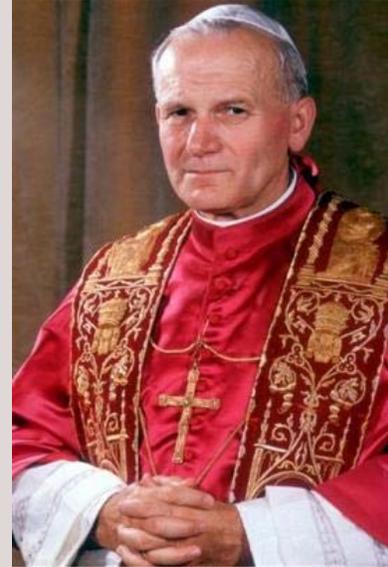


**"RECOVERING THE 'UNITY OF TRUTH' BETWEEN THEOLOGY, PHILOSOPHY, AND SCIENCE"**

Sr. Rachel Marie Gosda, SCTJM

December 1, 2012

In his Encyclical Letter *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II refers to the unity of truth as "a fundamental premise of human reasoning."<sup>1</sup> He writes, "Revelation renders this unity certain, showing that the God of creation is also the God of salvation history. It is the one and the same God who establishes and guarantees the intelligibility and reasonableness of the natural order of things upon which scientists confidently depend."<sup>2</sup> As John Paul II teaches, the natural desire of the human person to seek the truth can never be frustrated by a contradiction between faith and reason, for these two modes of knowledge lead to truth in all its fullness.<sup>3</sup> Thus, "The Truth, which is Christ, imposes itself as an all-embracing authority which holds out to theology and philosophy alike the prospect of support, stimulation, and increase."<sup>4</sup> To this phrase, let us be so bold as to add "science" here, as well, as it is (like philosophy) a discipline rooted in natural reason. In this light, we see that the fullness of truth revealed in Jesus Christ is authoritative: it gives order, shape, and form; furthermore, its acceptance can only vivify and strengthen theology, philosophy, and science. Turning now to these three disciplines, we shall examine how they can be strengthened in the service of Christ's authoritative Truth and thus mutually strengthen each other for a harmonious contemplation of truth both revealed and natural.



Let us begin with the most natural of these disciplines: science. One of the greatest contributions that science can make to faith is that it "always points beyond [itself] to something higher than the immediate object of study, to the questions which give access to Mystery."<sup>5</sup> Thus, when aimed at a wholistic understanding of the truth (the ultimate meaning and cause of life) and subjected to the revealed Truth of Christ, advancements in the field of scientific knowledge and research can only aid "the appreciation of what is taught by faith."<sup>6</sup> Fr. Mullady lists a few examples of this: how further exploration of the cosmos can lead one to greater awe of the majesty and power of God; how scientific theories such as the theory of relativity can both demonstrate a possibility for the beginning of matter and yet, at the same time, underline the mysterious nature of that matter; and how discoveries in human psychology can lead to a more developed appreciation of what is happening in morals.<sup>7</sup> These are descriptions of science conducted in its ideal Christian way; however, when it deviates from reference to absolute Truth, science can focus solely on its pragmatic value and power over nature and thus become a discipline that is limited to material causes only.<sup>8</sup> In order to serve as a handmaid to theology, science too must abide by the three reformative principles that John Paul calls for in philosophy in order to recover its "proper nature."<sup>9</sup> It is to these requirements that we now turn.

The first adjustment that scientists and philosophers must make is to recover the "sapiential dimension [of their work] as a search for the ultimate and overarching meaning of life."<sup>10</sup> Based upon the wisdom that comes from the Word of God, this dimension has been neglected by the modern sciences due to their separation from God and the unity of truth. Recovering this element will not only "determine the foundations and limits of the different fields of scientific learning, but will also take its place as the ultimate framework of the unity of human knowledge and action."<sup>11</sup> The second requirement flows from this first one: that philosophy (and likewise, science) verify the human capacity to know the truth, the objective and universal truth about the very being of the object known.<sup>12</sup> One of the greatest factors contributing to the breakdown between faith and reason beginning in the late Medieval Period was disbelief in man's capacity to know the truth. A return to this principle would help restore the union between faith and reason that once so beautifully existed in the heart of the Church and the heart of the world. Finally, the third requirement to which John Paul calls philosophers and scientists is the need for a genuine metaphysics to undergird "sapiential and analytical knowledge alike."<sup>13</sup> This would be of the utmost value to aid theology's work of understanding Revelation, which deals with Being Himself—God—who has revealed to mankind its identity, purpose, and being in Him. As John Paul goes on to show, making such adjustments in the discipline of

philosophy would greatly enhance and support the work of theology, especially in areas today which suffer at the hands of a misled philosophy: morality, the analysis of Biblical and Magisterial texts, and the understanding of revealed Truth.<sup>14</sup>

John Paul II teaches that “theological work in the Church is first of all at the service of the proclamation of the faith and of catechesis.”<sup>15</sup> Theology, therefore, is aimed at evangelization! However, he also goes on to show that such a Christian philosophy here described is also a part of the “evangelization of culture” which Pope Paul VI set before the Church. He states, “Christian philosophers can develop a reflection which will be both comprehensible and appealing to those who do not yet grasp the full truth which divine Revelation declares.”<sup>16</sup> If this is true of philosophy, so too can it be true of science—and if this is the case, what a great urgency there is to embrace his vision of a correctly guided philosophy and science that, along with theology, can help to bring all men to the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>1</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter on the Relationship between Faith and Reason *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998), §34, at The Holy See, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>2</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §34.

<sup>3</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §34.

<sup>4</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §92.

<sup>5</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §92.

<sup>6</sup> Fr. Brian Mullady, O.P., class notes on *Philosophy for Theologians*, (Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles College & Seminary, distributed 27 August 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Mullady, notes, (27 August 2012).

<sup>8</sup> Mullady, notes, (27 August 2012).

<sup>9</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §81.

<sup>10</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §81.

<sup>11</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §81.

<sup>12</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §82.

<sup>13</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §83.

<sup>14</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §93, §97, §98.

<sup>15</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §99.

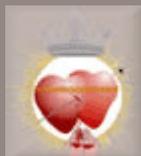
<sup>16</sup> *Fides et Ratio*, §103-104.

#### Works Cited

John Paul II. Encyclical Letter on the Relationship between Faith and Reason *Fides et Ratio* (14 September 1998). At The Holy See, [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

Mullady, Fr. Brian, O.P. Class notes on *Philosophy for Theologians*. Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles College & Seminary, distributed 27 August 2012.

[Back to Main Page of Teachings of SCTJM...](#)



[Return to main page](#)  
[www.piercedhearts.org](http://www.piercedhearts.org)