

OPINION

Christians have a strict duty to develop their understanding of the faith

Fundamental theology deals with the foundations of the Christian religion. The scandal of our day is prompting many apostasies from the Church – if we want to turn the tide, we must return to the sources.



Man studying Bible

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([LifeSiteNews](#)) — In a previous [article](#) on LifeSiteNews, Matthew McCusker set out the theoretical schema of steps by which the certainty of the Catholic religion is established:

Step 1: By the use of our natural reasoning powers, we can come to know with certainty that God exists, and we can gain knowledge, albeit incomplete, of His nature and attributes.

Step 2: By reflecting on what we have discovered about God and His nature, as well as what reason tells us about man and his nature, we can reach the further conclusion that God is capable of bestowing a revelation upon mankind, which we are capable of recognizing and receiving.

Step 3: By the use of our natural reasoning powers applied to the evidence for divine revelation, and especially the evidence of miracles and prophecies, we can attain certain knowledge that over the course of centuries God has indeed revealed Himself, and that this revelation culminates in Jesus Christ, whom we can identify as the Divine Legate sent by God.

Step 4: Having recognized Jesus Christ as the Divine Legate, we will, by receiving His teachings, attain certain knowledge that not only is He from God, but that He *is God*. Furthermore, we will learn from Him that He has established a Church to which He has delivered the fullness of His Divine Revelation. This Church will, He has promised, infallibly transmit this deposit of the faith until the end of time.

Step 5: On examining the claims of the churches, we will discover that only one possesses those marks and attributes that identify her as the Church founded by Jesus Christ. We will become certain that the Church of Christ is the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, which has the Bishop of Rome as her visible head. By this means we will demonstrate the right of the Catholic Church to propose and teach the doctrine of divine revelation.

Step 6: By an act of supernatural faith, we will give intellectual assent to all the truths which have been revealed by God and which are presented for our belief by the teaching authority (magisterium) of the Catholic Church.

This is a *theoretical* schema of the grounds of faith, as he also noted:

[N]ot everybody goes through this process sequentially. Many people receive the supernatural virtue of faith in baptism as infants, and the doctrine of the faith directly from their parents as children, and never lose it.

However, everyone can benefit from understanding the grounds of the faith more deeply; and in our day it has become even more indispensable.

Over recent months, McCusker has been setting out the arguments for “Step 1,” which can be called *Natural Theology* – along with an explanation of the importance of the true philosophy of which natural theology forms a part:

- **God exists. But is His existence self-evident?**
- **Is it possible to prove the existence of God?**
- **God’s existence can be known by the light of natural reason**

- **Without God nothing else could exist**
- **Created beings cannot be the source of creation. Only God can be**
- **The Catholic Church teaches that men can know God exists through reason alone**
- **False philosophies can't solve man's problems. Only the true philosophy can**
- **Nietzsche and Kant won't lead you to truth. Scholastic philosophy will**
- **How the wonders of creation lead us to God**
- **How God helped get Catholic philosophy started**

This series is ongoing.

Fundamental theology

Natural theology is distinguished from *Sacred Theology* in that the former considers God as known by the light of *natural reason*, whereas the latter considers him as known by the light of *divine revelation*.

I intend to now begin a parallel series on the early stages of *Fundamental Theology*, in particular Step 3 – the proofs of the divine revelation of Jesus Christ.

Step 2 – the possibility of revelation – addresses very specific problems. In former times, it was more common to find skeptical thinkers denying that God could reveal himself to mankind; while their objections do need to be answered, they are not of great interest to the average person, who takes it for granted that an omnipotent God (whose existence is proved in Step 1) is capable of making himself known to us.

Why this task is essential in our day

There can be no doubt that we are living in the single worst crisis in the history of the Church. Many of us have an uncomfortable impression that defections and apostasies from the Church have been increasing in recent years – and it is in no little measure because of the crisis.

Many of these people are on the brink of losing the faith and disappearing into heresy, schism or apostasy – and thus out of the Church. Even worse, we may not even know their situation until it is too late.

These examples are becoming more frequent, and closer to home. At first it might have just been “influencers,” then it may have been friends of friends, then loose contacts – but sooner rather than later, it will inevitably be our own personal friends and family – unless we can do something to stop it.

We do not want to abandon them to what John-Henry Newman described in a sermon:

Oh, the utter confusion of mind, the wreck of faith and opinion, the blackness and void, the dreary skepticism, the hopelessness, which would have been my lot, the pledge of the outer darkness to come, had I been afraid to follow Him!

In the face of all these defections, it is essential that every Catholic is equipped with what they need to keep the faith themselves, and to assist those around them.

Theological understanding is poor

Much of the material online is simplistic, low quality or misleading – as are the various theories proposed to explain our situation. There are some who wish to bury their heads in the sand, and pretend that the challenge presented by our current situation is not as great as it may seem – and that it is exaggerated by those who have an “agenda” opposed to Francis.

While some might be satisfied with this, many are not.

It is not enough to know lots of individual details about the Catholic faith, history and the current crisis. Nor is it enough to be able to defend controverted doctrines about Our Lady or the sacraments against tired anti-Catholic objections.

The problem is more fundamental, and so our theological grasp must be more fundamental too.

Modern attempts to demonstrate the reasonableness and truth of the Catholic religion follow a different approach – and their efficiency is highly questionable. We need to return to the scholastic, fundamental theology from before the religious revolution of Vatican II.

As Our Lord said in the Gospel:

[N]o man drinking old hath presently a mind to new: for he saith: The old is better. (Luke 5:39)

What many need – for themselves, and to assist others – is a full, systematic understanding of the discipline of natural and fundamental theology – broken down into simpler language and terms than was current before it was basically abandoned at Vatican II, and diffused more widely than it was.

This is a duty for all, but especially the more educated

In his classic work *This Tremendous Lover*, Dom Eugene Boylan lamented that the only time that laymen would read theology would be “from the point of view of apologetic argument than from that of a dogmatic foundation for true devotion.” However, not even this is the case today.

There are many people who are highly accomplished in their fields, and yet whose understanding of the faith is no more sophisticated than that of a high school graduate – if that.

Our Lord told us that we must become like little children – but this is not to the point here.

Consider the human hand. If it were to grow and develop as normal *except for one finger*, we would think that there was a serious problem. Similarly, if a child grows into a man but maintains the limb of a child, he will be debilitated.

In a similar way, when a man becomes more and more educated – be it in the humanities, the sciences, or with technical skills – but allows his understanding of the Catholic religion to stay at the same level as when he left school, or even to atrophy over time, he is arguably putting himself in an occasion of sin.

The occasion of sin is that his increased expertise elsewhere will lead him to pride and then to temptations against the faith – a faith which he may come to look down on as simplistic. But this is only possible because of the simplistic and superficial grasp which he has of it – because he neglected to allow his grasp to develop at the same rate as his other knowledge.

Aside from this, does not God deserve the worship of our intelligence, as well as that of our will? Our Lord told us that we must love God not only with our heart, soul and strength – but also our minds. The theologian Joachim Salaverri talks of the submission of our intelligence to the Church’s teaching as “a great sacrifice from rational individuals”: it is not right to offer God any kind of sacrifice that is withered or impoverished, but rather one that is clean and worthy of him.

For these reasons, it is essential for the glory of God and for the salvation of souls that we reclaim the tradition of scholastic fundamental theology, and show that the claims of Christ and his one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church – the Roman Church – are indeed unassailable.

With God’s help, that is what we shall do in this series.

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Further Reading:

Fr. Reginald Garrigou-Lagrange OP – On Divine Revelation (2 vols.)

Fr. Michael Nicolau SJ – Sacrae Theologiae Summa Vol. IA

Mgr Joseph C. Fenton – Laying the Foundations

Mgr G. Van Noort – The True Religion

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