

# MODUL II – ISTORIA APOLOGETICII

## Lectia 3 - PERIOADA MEDIEVALA (AD 600-1500)

Dispute islamice (sec. 7 - sec. 10)

- a. în teritoriul islamic: 600–1000, Ioan Damaschinul, Teodor Abu Qurrah și Timotei I al Bagdadului
- b. în Europa de Vest: 600–1100, Isidor din Sevilla, Petru Damian,

Secolul 11: Anselm din Canterbury

Secolul 12: Peter Alphonsi, Peter Abelard, Richard of St. Victor

Secolul 13: Thomas D'Aquinas, and his disciples

Apologeți misionari: 1250–1320, Raymond Martini, Raymond Lull

Secolul 15:

Dionysius de Carthusia, Nicholas de Cusa, Marsilio Ficino,  
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## Secolele 11-15

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The foregoing survey of the patristic period has traced the encounter of the biblical faith with peoples whose modes of thought were shaped by the classical heritage. In order to commend itself to such a civilization, Christianity absorbed into itself, and in so doing transformed, many of the riches of pagan philosophy and letters. So successfully was this done that the pagans themselves found the new Christian-Hellenistic synthesis more appealing than the *ersatz* religions of Julian and the Neoplatonists.

In medieval Europe the unity of Greco-Roman culture with the Christian faith was taken for granted. To the barbarians who invaded the Empire, the Church appeared as the mother of the arts and letters, philosophy and law. To reject the Church was to make oneself a social and cultural as well as a religious outcast.

The apostolic struggle of Christianity in this period was not with the old pagans or the young barbarians but with other races that had a rich cultural heritage of their own. In the West there were pockets of unconverted Jews, living by the Mosaic Law and the Talmud. To the East there was the constantly growing power of **Islam**, which represented a cultural and military as well as a religious challenge to Christendom. Against Jews and Arabs the medieval theologians would direct their strongest apologetic endeavors. A third strand of medieval apologetic was reflective. The effort of the Scholastic theologians to discern the rational grounds for their own commitment to Christ and to the Church would furnish materials for later apologetic encounters with skeptics and freethinkers.

*The last representatives of the patristic age are the true founders of the Middle Ages. John Damascene (c. 674–c. 750) In the East, is often designated as the last of the Fathers; in the West, Isidore of Seville (d. 636). These two great synthesizers provided models for medieval apologetics in the East and the West respectively.*

### **Sec. 11: Anselm in Canterbury (1033–1109)**

Anselm (1033–1109), the great Benedictine abbot who became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, is important to the history of apologetics not so much because of his formally apologetical writing as because of his reflections on the relationship between faith and reason, which were to have an important influence on the apologetics of the high Middle Ages. His teaching on this point may be studied in his *Monologion* (1076), his *Proslogion* (1077–1078), and his *Cur Deus homo* (begun about 1094, completed 1098).<sup>22</sup> The first two of these treatises deal with the existence and attributes of God (including the Trinity), the third with the reasons for the Incarnation and hence with the theology of Redemption.

The *Cur Deus homo* has special apologetical significance, being cast in the form of a dialogue between the author and the monk Boso, who objects on the part of the infidel. As many scholars have pointed out,<sup>23</sup> the *Cur Deus homo* stands in the tradition of the Jewish-Christian polemical dialogues of the Middle Ages, from Isidore to Gilbert Crispin. There are grounds for supposing that it was under Gilbert's influence that Anselm was induced to complete his *Cur Deus homo*.<sup>24</sup>

**All three of Anselm's works**, however, are basically **similar in method**.

He regularly begins in faith, accepting as true whatever is taught by the Scriptures and the creeds. He then seeks through the use of reason to achieve understanding of what he already believes.

**The necessity of beginning in faith** is particularly stressed in the beginning of the *Proslogion*: "I do not seek to understand that I may believe, but I believe in order to understand. For this also I believe that unless I believed I should not understand."<sup>25</sup> Similarly in the *Cur Deus homo* Anselm declares:

"Right order requires us to believe the deep things of Christian faith before we undertake to discuss them by reason."<sup>26</sup>

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Although the theologian does seek reasons, his faith in no way depends upon the success of this effort.

"Since I thus consider myself to hold the faith of our redemption, by the prevenient grace of God, so that, even were I unable in any way to understand what I believe, still nothing would shake my constancy."<sup>27</sup>

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Anselm is therefore far removed from rationalism as it has developed since the Enlightenment.

But if understanding presupposes faith, still it remains true according to Anselm that faith can issue in understanding. The movement from faith to understanding is for him the essence of theology. To his *Proslogion* he therefore gives the title "**Faith Seeking Understanding**" and to his *Monologion* the title "**An Example of Meditating on the Logic of Faith**".<sup>28</sup> For Anselm, to understand is nothing other than to grasp the objective reasons, **the rationes**, that underlie and illumine the data of faith.

**That faith is objectively rational is a cardinal principle of Anselm's whole theological enterprise.** God, he holds, is supreme truth and hence eminently intelligible; and all that God does is conformed to

reason. He cannot act arbitrarily or irrationally. Man, insofar as he is by nature an image of God, participates through his faculties of memory, intellect, and will in this self-luminous divine nature. If there are truths too sublime for human reason to fathom—and Anselm repeatedly insists that there are—this is not because they are above reason itself but because man, especially in his present fallen condition, is not fully rational. Thus Anselm prays:

Lord, I acknowledge and I thank thee that thou hast created me in this thine image, in order that I may be mindful of thee, conceive of thee, and love thee; but that image has been so consumed and wasted away by vices, and obscured by the smoke of wrongdoing, that it cannot achieve that for which it was made, except thou renew it, and create it anew.<sup>29</sup>

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Hence theology must be conducted at every moment under the leading of divine grace, and the theologian must continually maintain the attitude of prayer.

While he values the guidance of Scripture and Church teaching and the help of prayer and grace, **Anselm does not underestimate the importance of seeking the inner intelligibility of the truths of faith.** Authorities can correct the theologian when he goes astray, but they do not take the place of cogent reasons. Theology, as Anselm conceives it, must necessarily be conducted *sola ratione* (by reason alone).<sup>30</sup>

In the *Monologion* he agrees to write in such wise

“that nothing from Scripture should be urged on the authority of Scripture itself, but that whatever the conclusion of independent investigation should declare to be true, should, in an unadorned style, with common proofs and with a simple argument, be briefly enforced by the cogency of reason, and plainly expounded in the light of truth”.<sup>31</sup>

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In the *Cur Deus homo*, where Anselm is dealing not with anything resembling natural theology but with soteriology, he adopts the rule of proceeding by “leaving Christ out of view (as if nothing had ever been heard of him)”.<sup>32</sup> In this treatise Anselm does, it is true, assume the validity of other doctrines not under dispute, such as the existence and attributes of God, man’s fallen condition, and man’s destination to eternal beatitude. On the basis of these other doctrines he seeks to establish, by rational argument, the necessity of a redemptive Incarnation. The reasons that Anselm seeks are the objective reasons that prompted God to decree the Incarnation. To penetrate such reasons is to grasp more fully the data of faith.

Anselm sets forth various motives for his rational inquiry. He does not write to cure his own doubts or those of the monks who are his interlocutors or of the readers he envisages. All of these, he assumes, are convinced Christians, whose faith is solidly established on the Word of God. Precisely because they do believe, however, they are in search of understanding. Faith is a restless form of knowledge, always in search of the intrinsic reasons that account for its own data and make them able to be assimilated to man’s faculty of understanding. Understanding as a form of contemplation affords delight.<sup>33</sup> This delight, as Anselm explains in the dedicatory epistle of *Cur Deus homo* to Pope Urban II, is a kind of opaque anticipation of the beatific vision. “Since I conceive of the understanding to which we can attain in this life as standing midway between faith and the [beatific] vision, I judge that, the more anyone attains to it, the closer that person comes to the vision to which we all aspire.”<sup>34</sup> Not to cultivate such understanding would be, in Anselm’s estimation, a kind of negligence.<sup>35</sup>

Another benefit that Anselm has in mind for his readers is the properly apologetic one, that “as far as possible they may always be ready to convince anyone who demands of them a reason of that hope which is in us” (cf. 1 Pet 3:15). Infidels, he mentions, often ridicule Christian simplicity as absurd. Why

should God have sent His own Son into the world to die when it seems that He could have restored life to the world by some other being, angelic or human, or merely by His will?<sup>36</sup> In chapter 3 he explains in further detail that infidels, ridiculing the simplicity of Christians, “charge upon us that we do injustice and dishonor to God when we affirm that he was born of a woman, that he grew on the nourishment of milk and the food of men; and, passing over many things which seem incompatible with the deity, that he endured fatigue, hunger, thirst, stripes and crucifixion among thieves”.<sup>37</sup>

The aim of theological reasoning, therefore, is partly to equip believers to deal with nonbelievers. In meeting these difficulties Anselm is concerned to speak in terms meaningful to the nonbeliever. The common ground between them and believers is not faith but reason. “For although they appeal to reason because they do not believe [and thus have no alternative], and we, on the other hand, because we do believe; nevertheless, the thing sought is one and the same.”<sup>38</sup>

**Quite evidently, Anselm did not have in mind a distinct science of apologetics,** which would operate by principles and methods distinct from dogmatic theology. To attribute any such aim to Anselm would be as anachronistic as to imagine that he thought in terms of two distinct spheres of truth, some attainable by reason and some only by revelation. While such distinctions may be a legitimate prolongation of his thought, they do not seem to have occurred to Anselm himself. For him theological knowledge was a single science; it operated by reason under the guidance of faith; **but the arguments, insofar as they were based on cogent reasons, could be meaningful to those who lacked faith.**

All three of the works here examined are apologetical insofar as they aim to set forth reasons capable of convincing unbelievers. At the end of the Proslogion Anselm exclaims that he now understands God’s existence so clearly that even if he no longer wanted to believe he would be unable to question or deny it.<sup>39</sup>

In the appendix to the Monologion he declares himself satisfied that he has given a proof of God that compels the assent of the “fool” who denies the authority of revelation.<sup>40</sup>

And at the end of the Cur Deus homo he claims to have given a demonstration of the validity of the entire biblical revelation. In the words of Boso:

All things which you have said seem to me reasonable and incontrovertible. And by the solution of the single question proposed do I see the truth of all that is contained in the Old and New Testament. For, in proving that God became man by necessity, leaving out what was taken from the Bible, viz., the remarks on the persons of the Trinity, and on Adam, you convince both Jews and Pagans by the mere force of reason. And the God-man himself originates the New Testament and approves the Old. And, as we must acknowledge him to be true, so no one can dissent from anything contained in these books.<sup>41</sup>

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*Anselm is the ancestor of a whole line of apologists, from Richard of St. Victor and Raymond Lull to Georg Hermes and Hegel, who seek to find demonstrative reasons for the Trinity, the Incarnation, and other central doctrines. The difficulty in all such approaches, as in Anselm himself, is that they seem to convert faith into reason and thus to render faith itself—in the sense of assent on authority—only provisionally necessary.*

In Anselm’s own writing one finds no clear solution to the apparent inconsistency in his views that **faith is necessary and reason sufficient.**

**In raising so clearly the question of the intrinsic demonstrability of Christian faith Anselm made an epochal contribution to the history of apologetics.**

### **Sec. 12: Peter the Venerable, Abelard,**

In the more strictly apologetical literature of the twelfth century, as represented by the tracts against Jews and Muslims, intrinsic arguments for the truths of faith played only a minor role. Several of the most interesting works were composed by convert Jews.

The Spaniard Peter Alphonsi (1062—1110),

who became a Christian at the age of forty-four, dedicated to his godfather, Alphonso I of Aragon, a *Dialogue with the Jew Moses*, in which he combined a vigorous attack on Islam with ridicule for the Talmud.<sup>44</sup> His work, however, has the great merit of presenting a relatively complete account of Muslim beliefs. Another convert, Hermann of Cologne (1108—1198), having entered the Church at about the age of twenty, some years later as a Premonstratensian monk wrote an edifying account of his own conversion.<sup>45</sup> He tells how he was drawn by the ideal of Christian charity as set forth in the Gospels and as exemplified in the lives of some Christian churchmen whom he met.

In one of the more interesting controversial pieces of this century, entitled *Dialogue between a Christian and a Jew*, the traditional theologian Rupert of Deutz (c. 1075—1129) focuses on the miracles of Scripture as a primary evidence.<sup>46</sup> Having depicted the Jew as grounding his faith in Moses in the signs and prodigies of the Old Testament, Rupert replies in the person of the Christian by pointing to the marvelous signs that accompanied the preaching of the Apostles.<sup>47</sup>

Peter the Venerable (1094—1156),

The most eminent twelfth-century apologist was Peter the Venerable (1094—1156), the last great abbot of Cluny.

The longest of his works is a hortatory apology, **Against the Inveterate Obstinance of the Jews**.<sup>48</sup> Unlike many medieval works of similar titles it is primarily intended not for the instruction of Christians but for the conversion of Jews, for whose salvation the author is deeply concerned.

#### **Against Jews**

Drawing on patristic sources and his personal familiarity with Jewish texts and possibly making use of the work of Peter Alphonsi, Peter makes earnest efforts to meet objections based on the Hebrew text of the Bible and on the Talmud. **The main thesis of this apology is that the coming of the divine Messiah, His humiliations, and His establishment of a spiritual kingdom were accurately foretold by the Israelite Prophets. In an interesting excursus Peter discusses the credibility of Jesus's miracles and those connected with the true Cross and the holy sepulcher.**<sup>49</sup> Miracles alone, he contends, can account for the conversion of the world to the Christian faith. As a criterion for the authenticity of miracles Peter insists upon utility. No arbitrary marvels, genuine miracles are intended to prepare the whole person, body and soul, for the glorious risen life. The final chapter, "concerning the ridiculous and most stupid fables of the Jews", was probably composed in the context of the Second Crusade.<sup>50</sup>

#### **Against Islam**

More important than Peter the Venerable's answer to Judaism was his apologetic against Islam.<sup>51</sup> **The military action of the Crusades, he believed, would come to nothing unless supplemented by a work of evangelization.**

The errors of Islam, **however, could not** be refuted until there were scholars proficient in Arabic and familiar with the Qur'an. About 1143 at Peter's behest the English astronomer Robert of Ketton translated into Latin the life of Muhammad and the Qur'an. Using these materials, Peter then composed a brief summary of Islamic doctrine<sup>52</sup> and later, failing to interest Bernard of Clairvaux in the project of refuting Islam, himself wrote **A Book against the Sect or Heresy of the Saracens**.<sup>53</sup>

**In this work Peter—following John Damascene's characterization of Islam as a Christian heresy—reassures** the Muslims that he approaches them, not "as our people often do, by arms, but by words; not by force, but by reason; not in hatred, but in love". He then appeals to the objectivity of philosophical study as a model for the impartiality that should characterize religious debate. His actual refutation of Islam reflects the influence of the work of Al-Kindi, which had been translated into Latin at Peter's direction. The Muslims, he argues are obliged by the Qur'an to look upon the Christian Bible as divinely authoritative, but the Bible attests not to Muhammad but only to Jesus Christ as the true teacher. Thus in following the Bible one is compelled to reject Muhammad.

Toward the end of the twelfth century the standard arguments from the Old Testament prophecies and the Sibylline oracles were set forth with rhetorical skill by the humanist Peter of Blois (d. 1202) in his *Against the Perfidy of the Jews*.<sup>54</sup> In this work he repeatedly warns his Christian readers against the devious and diabolical tactics by which the Jews seek to evade the force of the evidences. In another work, designed for the instruction of the Sultan of Iconium, who was said to be considering conversion to the Christian faith, Peter insisted primarily on arguments from the suitability of the Incarnation, the virginal conception, the Passion, and the Resurrection of Christ.

Among the Scholastic theologians of the thirteenth century the problem of the relationship between faith and reason, so acutely raised by Anselm, continued to excite considerable interest.

Peter Abelard (1079—1142),

without being a rationalist in the eighteenth-century sense, gave considerable scope to reason in the area of religious conviction.

**Reversing the traditional Augustinian order, he maintained that human reason, making use of objectively accessible evidences, could achieve some kind of inchoative faith,** paving the way for the supernatural act of faith elicited under the influence of grace and charity.<sup>55</sup> In opposition to Bernard, Abelard argued that the "blind faith" of Abraham (see Rom 4:18) is an exceptional grace and is hence not normative for ordinary Christians. He cautioned against precipitate faith, quoting from the Ecclesiast: "One who trusts others too quickly is light-minded" (Sir 19:4).<sup>56</sup>

In his remarkably modern and unpolemical work, *A Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*,<sup>57</sup> Abelard discusses at some length the rational grounds for faith. Near the beginning the philosopher complains that religion lags behind the other sciences and fails to progress because believers do not sufficiently question the traditions in which they have been reared. To this the Jew responds that while the authority of one's family and compatriots exerts a legitimate influence on the faith of the young, the faith of adults should be based on rational choice. Later in the dialogue the philosopher praises Christians because instead of childishly relying on miracles and other visible signs—as do the Jews—they make use of rational arguments. The best evidence in favor of Christianity, according to the philosopher, consists in its demonstrated capacity to convert educated men, such as the Greeks of old. The philosopher then deplores the fideism of some Christian preachers (did Abelard have Bernard in mind at this point?), an attitude that compares unfavorably with Augustine's respect for the role of rational inquiry. If reason were silenced, complains the philosopher, believers would have no way of answering an idolater who held up a piece of wood and demanded that it be adored as God! At the very least, says the philosopher, reason is needed to select what authority one is going to follow.<sup>58</sup>

The apologetic proposed by the Christian in the Dialogue highlights the moral superiority of Christianity, with its ethic of charity, over all other religions, including Judaism. The Christian shows to the satisfaction of the philosopher that man's highest good must consist in a happiness to be granted in the other world as a reward for virtue. The great contribution of Christ is to have held forth a sure promise of this goal.

In his *Christian Theology*, and less fully in several other works, Abelard takes up the theme so dear to Justin, Clement, and Augustine that the divine Logos had shed its light not only on the Jewish Prophets but also on the Greek philosophers, preparing them for the clear revelation of the Trinity in the New Testament.<sup>59</sup> Like Augustine, Abelard exploits the Trinitarian implications of the Neoplatonic doctrine of the divine emanations in the form of Mind (*Mens, Nous*) and World-soul (*anima mundi*). To this Abelard adds the brief but significant remark that even the Brahmins of India acknowledged the divinity of the Word and of the Spirit.<sup>60</sup>

Taking up the objection that Christians are opposed to all others in their acceptance of the Trinity, Abelard simply denies the alleged fact.

Both Jews and Gentiles, he says, admit that God has "made all things in wisdom" (cf. Ps 103:24, Vulg) and that He radiates goodness. "From this I believe that we can find an easy opportunity of converting all others to our own faith, if by such reasoning we can convince them that they already have a community of faith with us, so that even while they do not confess with their mouths as we do, since they misunderstand the meaning of our words, they still hold to it in their hearts, as it is written, 'By the heart a man believes unto justice' (Rom 10:10)."<sup>61</sup>

*In his zeal to build bridges from Christian orthodoxy to alien religions and philosophies and to close the rift between faith and reason*, Abelard may have tended to **rationalize the faith too much and to minimize what was distinctively Christian**. Quite predictably he excited the opposition of zealous monks whose views were more rigid than his own. His most powerful adversary, Bernard of Clairvaux, rivaled Peter Damian in distrust of dialectics.<sup>62</sup> The contest between Abelard and Bernard has remained vivid in Western memory, for it symbolizes the tension between two Christian attitudes that recur in every generation—an apologetically inclined mentality, which seeks to find as broad a common ground as possible with the non-Christian, and a strictly dogmatic stance, which would safeguard the integrity of the faith even at the price of placing severe limits on the free exercise of reason.

### *Sec. 13: Toma d'Aquinas (1225—1274)*

#### Context

The tone of dialogue with the Jews was affected by the missionary zeal of the mendicant orders (Franciscan and Dominican) and by the atmosphere of the Crusades.

#### **Against Jews**

The increasing availability of rabbinic literature, with its own interpretation of the Jewish faith, caused Christians to become more defensive.

Pope Gregory IX (1227—1241) demanded that Jewish books be confiscated; his successor Innocent IV (1243—1254) accused the Talmud of blasphemies against God. Formal debates were instituted with strict ground rules to prevent the Jews from gaining the upper hand. But in spite of these restrictions some progress was made. Christian theologians profited from a better mastery of rabbinic literature, as will be seen below.

*Medieval Christian apologists*, like their patristic predecessors, contended that since Jews had rejected Christ, **Christianity was now the true Israel...** They appealed to a variety of texts in the Hebrew Scriptures to prove that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Relying on spiritual exegesis, they accused the Jews of excessive literalism in the interpretation of these texts.<sup>67</sup>

## Islam

The situation of Christendom vis-a-vis the Muslim world was radically altered first by the **failure of the Crusades** to bring Islam to its knees and second by the penetration of Arabic culture and science into the Western world.

**Arabic philosophy** came to be known principally through the work of the Spanish Arab **Averroes (1126–1198)**, who looked upon Aristotle as the highest possible exponent of philosophical truth and who composed an immensely influential series of paraphrases, compendia, and commentaries on the works of the master. The commentaries of Averroes were diffused in the West about 1230, nearly the same time that Aristotle's principal works became available.

Although Averroes himself professed fidelity to Islam, he was regarded as unorthodox by his coreligionists and died in disgrace as a heretic. He seems to have looked upon the Qur'an as a crude, imaginative presentation of truths known to philosophy with greater clarity and precision. According to his philosophy the world is eternal and absolutely necessary. The only immortal element in man, moreover, is the agent intellect, which each individual shares in common with the entire human species.

Averroistic Aristotelianism ran afoul of many Christian doctrines, such as the freedom of creation, the origin of the world "in time", the future end of the world, divine providence, and personal immortality. It precluded the whole concept of an economy of Redemption—Incarnation, Church, and sacraments.

The penetration of Averroes into the European universities precipitated a major spiritual crisis. The leading theologians of the thirteenth century were compelled to spend much of their time and energy in efforts to resist the Averroist tide. At Paris the Averroist movement began in the early 1250s. In 1256, at the behest of Pope Alexander IV, Albert the Great composed a work *On the Unity of the Intellect* against Averroes. Under teachers such as Siger of Brabant and Boetius of Dacia, however, the forbidden philosophy continued to gain ground. A new turn in Christian apologetics was demanded by this situation, and this need was met to the fullest extent by Albert's more eminent disciple, Thomas Aquinas.

## Tomas Aquinas - viața (1225—1274)

Thomas Aquinas (1225—1274), after his theological studies at Paris and Cologne, taught at Paris from 1256 to 1259 and again from 1268 to 1272. Like his master, St. Albert, he judged that the errors of Aristotelianism could best be met by erecting a Christian Aristotelianism that incorporated the best insights of the Stagirite.<sup>68</sup> To this end St. Thomas wrote a series of philosophical commentaries on Aristotle, seeking to interpret the master in a way more favorable to Christianity than his Arabic commentators had done. On certain points, he conceded, Christian revelation had corrected and completed what Aristotle had seen in a deficient manner.

**The apologetics of Aquinas** is most fully set forth in his great doctrinal synthesis, the *Summa contra gentiles*, which bears in some manuscripts the more descriptive title, *On the Truth of the Catholic Faith*

*against the Errors of the Unbelievers.* This work he composed either between 1258 and 1264 or, according to another view, between 1270 and 1272, at the request, apparently, of the former master-general of the Dominicans Raymond of Pennafort, who was much concerned with the apostolate toward the Saracens. According to the early chronicler Peter Marsili:

Furthermore, strongly desiring the conversion of unbelievers, Raymond asked an outstanding Doctor of Sacred Scripture, a Master in Theology, Brother Thomas of Aquino of the same Order, who among all the clerics of the world was considered to be, next to Brother Albert, the greatest, to compose a work against the errors of unbelievers, by which both the cloud of darkness might be dispelled and the teaching of the true Sun might be made manifest to those who refuse to believe. The renowned Master accomplished what the humility of so great a Father asked, and composed a work called the *Summa Against the Gentiles*, held to be without equal in its field.<sup>69</sup>

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It would seem that even if Thomas wrote for the benefit of Christian missionaries in Spain, he also had in mind the needs of scholars at Paris and in the universities generally where Averroism was becoming a major threat. Perhaps one may say with M.-D. Chenu, “It is rather a whole lot of errantes [erring], pagans, Muslims, Jews, heretics, who are examined and censured.”<sup>70</sup>

#### Prezentarea cărții lui Toma: *Summa Contra Gentiles*

The *Summa* is an all-embracing apologetical theology drawn up with an eye to the new challenge of the scientific Greco-Arabic worldview.

**In Book 1, chapters 1-9,** Thomas sets forth **his apologetical method** First he shows that the wise person is the one who considers all things in the light of the supreme truth, that is, the truth that pertains to the first principle from which all reality derives. The refutation of error, moreover, belongs to the same science as the discovery and exposition of truth. Thus the theologian, who contemplates reality in the light of the divine wisdom, has the task of refuting errors in religious teaching (1.1).

Thomas then explains that his aim in this work is to make known the truth that the Catholic faith professes and to confute the errors opposed to it. But to proceed against particular errors is difficult for two reasons. First, Thomas himself, not being familiar from actual experience with the views of the adversaries, feels unqualified to rebut their contentions by arguments that they would recognize as valid. In this respect, he explains, he is in a worse position than the early apologists, who had themselves been pagans or had at least lived in daily contact with paganism. Second, some of the adversaries, such as Muslims and pagans—unlike Jews and heretical Christians—deny the sacred character of the Christian Scriptures and therefore cannot be refuted by arguments from authority. For these two reasons, Thomas decides to proceed positively rather than negatively and to argue from reason rather than authority. As he establishes each point in his argument, he will point out the contrary errors that his demonstration implicitly excludes (1.2).

In chapter 3 Thomas sets forth a basic principle of his apologetic, derived, perhaps, from the Spanish-Jewish theologian Maimonides (1135–1204). The human mind in its effort to discover the divine ground of all things has limited competence. It can establish the existence of the one personal God and many other important religious truths, but there is a higher sphere of truths that remain impenetrable to man unless God is pleased to make them known by revelation (1.3).

It would be an error, however, to confine the content of revelation to truths of the latter class. On the contrary, there are good reasons why God should wish to reveal even naturally knowable religious

truths. If He did not do so, such truths would be known only by a few and by them only after long years of study, with many uncertainties and not without admixture of error. Revelation, on the other hand, puts such truths in their purity within easy access of even the young and the untutored (1. 4).

At this point Thomas goes on to prove that it is suitable for God to reveal truths of the second class—those beyond the range of rational inquiry. For such knowledge is in many ways profitable. It inflames our love for God and enables us to direct our lives to God. A very imperfect knowledge of these high and recondite truths, Thomas holds, is more satisfying than a thorough knowledge of truths that lie easily within our grasp (1.5).

As the remainder of the *Summa contra gentiles* exhibits, apologetics takes on different forms when brought to bear on each of these types of revealed truth. Truths of the first class can be established by philosophical argument. In Books 1 through 3 Thomas proposes both demonstrative and probable arguments on behalf of these revealed doctrines. Book 1 deals with the existence and attributes of the one God.

**Book 2**, which treats of the *nature of creation* and the variety of created being, includes a lengthy section *refuting the Averroistic thesis that the world is necessarily coeternal with God*.

**Book 3** takes up the end of man. Like **Abelard**, Thomas thinks it possible to prove from reason that **the highest human felicity can consist only in the uninterrupted contemplation of God**. Thomas adds that since man cannot attain to a clear vision of God by his own powers and since his natural desire for such a vision cannot be in vain, God must provide after man's death a special light enabling the human soul to behold Him as He really is. Likewise **in Book 3 Thomas discusses the operations of Providence—which extends, contrary to the Averroistic opinion, to all particulars immediately—and deals at some length with miracles, as works that God alone can perform**. Later in Book 3 Thomas treats of divine law, rewards and punishments, and grace. He gives arguments from reason for the view that God must come to man's help by His grace in order that man may appropriately tend to the supernatural end that Thomas has assigned to man in Book 2.

**In Book 4** Thomas turns to **truths that by his own admission are beyond the investigative powers of human reason. These center about the Trinity, the Incarnation, the sacraments, the resurrection of the body, the last judgment, and the consummation of the world**. In dealing with such topics Thomas reverses the apologetic method of the preceding books. **He leads not with reason but with authority**; for, on the supposition that these truths are not knowable without revelation, it would be futile to seek to prove them philosophically.

Apologetics must show, first of all, that **the teaching of the Church is securely founded**, and this Thomas does by citations from Scripture. Then he goes on to refute the opposed heresies. He is able to show in the first place that the Catholic position is not absurd: it does not contradict anything held by faith or evident from experience. Furthermore, he can generally show that the heretical positions (e.g., those of Arius, Nestorius, and Eutyches) do involve contradictions either with naturally known truths or with fundamental Christian doctrines.

#### **Book4**

In some cases Thomas takes his argument one stage further. He goes on to prove that the Catholic position, while not rigorously demonstrable by necessary reasons, is supported by probable arguments. As an illustration, one may point out what is said in Book 4, chapter 54, on the suitability of the Incarnation. Responding to a number of objections against this doctrine, Thomas maintains: "If one earnestly and devoutly weighs the mysteries of the Incarnation, he will find so great a depth of wisdom that it exceeds human knowledge. In the Apostle's words: 'The foolishness of God is wiser than men' (1

Cor 1:25). Hence it happens that to him who devoutly considers it, more and more wondrous aspects of this mystery are made manifest.” Thomas then proceeds to explain how magnificently the Incarnation shows forth the wisdom, justice, and mercy of God, employing many of the same arguments already seen in Athanasius and Anselm. Then he concludes:

“These points, then, and similar ones make us able to conceive that it was not out of harmony with the divine goodness for God to become man, but extremely helpful for human salvation.”<sup>71</sup>

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Again, in chapter 56 Thomas gives a series of arguments to prove that it was suitable that Christ, having redeemed man by His incarnate life, should have instituted sacraments to apply the effects of His Redemption in the Church.

It might be thought that, in view of the powerful arguments for the Catholic doctrines in Book 4, St. Thomas might claim that unbelievers should be converted by a study of the arguments. But Thomas himself cautions against this view. In the introduction to the whole Summa he writes:

For that which is above reason we believe only because God has revealed it. Nevertheless, there are certain likely arguments that should be brought forth in order to make the divine truth known. This should be done for the training and consolation of the faithful, and not with the idea of refuting those who are adversaries. For the very inadequacy of the arguments would rather strengthen them in their error, since they would imagine that our acceptance of the truth of faith was based on such weak arguments.<sup>72</sup>

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But the question still remains: Why should one accept doctrines that are neither demonstrable nor refutable? Would it not be more reasonable to adopt toward them an attitude of modest agnosticism? At this point Thomas might perhaps have appealed to the grace of faith, but he preferred to carry the scope of apologetics one step further. He invoked extrinsic signs. God, in revealing things beyond the scope of human reason to His chosen messengers, equips the latter with a grace of speech to enable them to herald His word accurately and effectively.<sup>73</sup> He also accredits His messengers with miracles, which are, so to speak, the seal by which He identifies His doctrine.<sup>74</sup> Besides this, He sometimes enables His emissaries to predict future contingent events that would not be certainly known by anyone except God.<sup>75</sup> These extrinsic signs of credibility, while they do not directly prove the truth of any individual articles of belief, guarantee the contents of the faith in general.<sup>76</sup> The average Christian, in adhering to the Church as organ of revelation, implicitly accepts all that the Church believes and teaches even though he does not know the contents of the faith in detail.<sup>77</sup>

In proposing signs of credibility to the unbeliever, Thomas, as contrasted with the patristic apologists and with the anti-Jewish controversialists of the Middle Ages, puts very little stress on the argument from prophecy. But he frequently returns to the argument from miracles, which seems to play an essential role in his account of credibility.<sup>78</sup> He defines miracles in the strict sense as works that only God could perform. The highest miracles are those that nature could not perform under any circumstances, such as the location of two bodies in the same place.<sup>79</sup>

For a brief presentation of Thomas’s argument from miracles one may consult *Contra gentiles* 1.6, where he declares that the divine Wisdom, “in order to confirm those truths that exceed natural knowledge. . . gives visible manifestation to works that surpass the ability of all nature. Thus there are wonderful cures of illnesses, there is the raising of the dead, and the wonderful immutation in the heavenly bodies; and, what is more wonderful, there is the inspiration given to human minds, so that simple and untutored persons, filled with the gift of the Holy Spirit, come to possess instantaneously

the highest wisdom and the readiest eloquence.”<sup>80</sup> Unlike Augustine, Thomas gives no indication that he sees any difficulty in establishing the historicity of such happenings or in showing that, even if they did happen as described in Scripture, they were worked by God. Nevertheless Thomas goes on to add the argument so effectively used by Augustine—the miracle of the conversion of the ancient world to the faith in spite of the fact that Christianity curbed the pleasures of the senses, spurned the goods of the world, and invited men to poverty and persecution:

This wonderful conversion of the world to the Christian faith is the clearest witness of the signs given in the past; so that they should be further repeated, since they appear most clearly in their effect. For it would be truly more wonderful than all signs if the world had been led by simple and humble men to believe such lofty truths, to accomplish such difficult actions, and to have such high hopes. Yet it is also a fact that, even in our own time, God does not cease to work miracles through His saints for the confirmation of the faith.<sup>81</sup>

At this point, in one of the few really polemical passages of the *Summa contra gentiles*, Thomas confirms this argument by contrasting the spread of Christianity with that of Islam. Muhammad, he says, seduced the people by promises of carnal pleasure. His precepts gave free rein to our lower appetites. He taught no new and sublime truths but only what people of moderate intelligence are capable of discovering for themselves. And even this truth, in the Qur’an, is mixed with fables and errors. Muhammad, moreover, performed no miracles and fulfilled no prophecies. Those voluntarily converted to his religion were brutal inhabitants of the desert, ignorant of letters and philosophy. The further expansion of Islam took place by force of arms. Thus it is clear, Thomas concludes, that those who trust Muhammad’s words believe lightly (1.6).

By any standards the *Summa contra gentiles* is a masterpiece. It stands to other medieval apologies somewhat as Augustine’s *City of God* does to the output of the patristic age. But Augustine and Thomas are very different in mind and spirit. Where Augustine used Neoplatonism, Thomas has recourse to Aristotle. Where Augustine argued through the interpretation of history, Thomas depends primarily on metaphysics. Where Augustine uses the persuasion of rhetoric, Thomas uses careful and dispassionate reasoning. The *Summa contra gentiles* towers above all previous apologetic treatises by its absolute clarity, its perfect coherence, balance, economy, and precision.

St. Thomas gave classical form to the distinction between two sets of truths—those accessible to reason alone (***praebula fidei***) and those inaccessible without divine revelation accepted by a supernatural act of faith.<sup>82</sup> The first category includes the existence of God as creator and the end of the world as well as properties of God, such as His eternity, immutability, omnipotence, and omniscience. This distinction was to become settled Catholic doctrine with the revival of Thomism in the nineteenth century and the First Vatican Council.

Disagreements continue to occur even among Thomists as to the precise meaning of “reason alone”. Is Thomas talking about a hypothetical state of pure reason or about the actual state of reason in a descendant of Adam who has no access to biblical revelation? Does “pure reason” operate without the benefit of grace? It may also be asked how much force St. Thomas would attribute to miracles as a means by which reason can grasp the credibility of revelation. As Van Hove and others have shown, Thomas does not really drive home his theory about the verifiability and discernibility of miraculous occurrences in a manner that would meet the critical exigencies of the modern mind.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, Thomas hints that a special grace may be needed to discern whether an apparent miracle is really divine in origin or is a magical or diabolical counterfeit.<sup>84</sup> If Thomas falls back on such an appeal to charisms in order to verify miracles, what becomes of the allegedly rational structure of his apologetic?

As for that miracle that Thomas calls the most evident of all, the “conversion of the whole world” through the instrumentality of “simple and untutored persons”, one may put a good many questions that Thomas does not answer. To show that this was not explicable through natural causes would require an unimaginably complicated historical and psychological investigation. In an Augustine,

whose tactics are manifestly rhetorical, this argument seems quite appropriate; but in Thomas, with his penchant for metaphysical correctness, it is hardly satisfying.

But if one does not insist too much on the program set forth in the first few chapters of Book 1, it is possible to reach a very favorable judgment on the *Summa contra gentiles*. In point of fact, the extrinsicism of the fourth book is alleviated by an abundance of rational argument. As already stated, he develops some very long and persuasive proofs based on the total harmony of revealed truth, the accord between revelation and naturally known truths, and the correspondence between the Christian dogmas and the needs of human persons. Although he does not consider that he has rigorously demonstrated the strictly revealed truths from self-evident principles, Thomas does give very serious reasons in their favor.

Thus the argumentation in Book 4 comes far closer to that in the first three books than Thomas's own introductory remarks would lead one to expect. His method comes closer to that of Anselm and Abelard than to the extrinsicist apologetics of a Rupert of Deutz or a Peter the Venerable.

In perusing the *Summa contra gentiles* one is struck by the completeness, sublimity, and inspirational power of the total synthesis. Just as Clement and Origen, Eusebius and Augustine had shown the wonderful harmony between Christian revelation and the highest insights of the Platonic tradition, so Thomas was able to show, in a manner not less impressive, the capacity of the biblical revelation to absorb, correct, and complete the most brilliant achievements of Aristotle and his Arabian commentators.

#### Metoda apologetica a lui Toma Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274), the greatest of the Dominican theologians, established the skeleton of this 'system' of apologetics in his *De rationibus fidei contra Saracenos*, which he composed shortly after his great **Summa contra gentiles in 1264**.

In a brief chapter entitled 'How to argue with unbelievers' he summarised the underlying principles of his approach. In disputations with unbelievers about articles of the faith, you should not try to prove the faith by necessary reasons. This would belittle the sublimity of faith .... Yet whatever comes from the Supreme Truth cannot be false, and what is not false cannot be repudiated by any necessary reason .... So any Christian disputing about the articles of the faith should not try to prove the faith, but defend the faith. Thus blessed Peter [1 Peter 3:15] did not say: 'Always have your proof', but 'your answer ready,' so that reason can show that what the catholic faith holds is not false.<sup>25</sup>

According to Thomas, the doctrines of Christianity, which are believed 'only because they are revealed by God',<sup>26</sup> could not be demonstrated on the grounds of pure reason, but they could be shown to be consistent with it. Thus, his response to Muslim objections to the Christian faith was primarily concerned with showing how doctrines such as the Trinity and deity of Christ cohered with human reason.<sup>27</sup>

Thomas's assumption that the content of revelation, although not demonstrable, was capable of being supported and even confirmed by rational argumentation was shared by Riccoldo, but whereas the former set out to answer Muslim objections the latter's aim was to raise objections against the Muslim theology. In both cases, the basic presumption was that, according to John Tolan, 'reason can be used to destroy rival creeds and defend one's own doctrines from the charge of irrationality but not to prove the truth of Christianity.'<sup>28</sup>

## Apologetii scolastici ucenici ai lui Toma d'Aquinas

Through the end of the fourteenth century Scholastic theologians continued to debate the vexing questions that had arisen with Abelard and Bernard regarding the relationship between faith and reason and the motives for the judgment of credibility. Aquinas, distinguishing between naturally knowable and strictly supernatural truths, had proposed a compromise solution. For doctrines of the former class he admitted the possibility of stringent proofs from intrinsic reasons; for the latter, while admitting *rationes convenientiae* of a probable character, he made the reasonableness of faith turn chiefly on extrinsic evidences.

Many theologians of the Augustinian tradition, however, continued to hold that the central truths of faith should be defended by demonstrative internal arguments. St. Bonaventure (1221–1274), the most eminent theologian of the Franciscan order, is closer to Anselm than to Aquinas. While holding that faith itself is the result of a divine illumination, he makes room for rational investigation that discovers supporting reasons. Such an investigation, he maintains, is profitable to refute the objections of adversaries, to sustain those weak in faith, and to afford delight to the strong.<sup>92</sup> In addition to extrinsic signs of credibility—such as the testimony of Scripture, miracles, and the consent of the Church—Bonaventure strongly endorses Richard of St. Victor's search for necessary reasons for the truths of faith. Such reasons, despite their demonstrative character, do not render faith superfluous, for, says Bonaventure, "although they give a manner of certitude and evidence concerning divine matters, that certitude and evidence is not altogether clear so long as we are in this life."<sup>93</sup>

Several thirteenth-century Franciscans, loyal to Bonaventure, accused St. Thomas of excessive timidity in shying away from intrinsic arguments. The English friar William de la Mare, who received his master's degree in theology about 1274, strongly pressed this charge. He composed a correctorium (correction) of St. Thomas that the Franciscan order officially adopted at its general chapter of 1282.<sup>94</sup>

### *John Duns Scotus(1266—1308)*

The English Franciscan John Duns Scotus (1266–1308) gave greater weight to the extrinsic evidences in supporting the judgment of faith. While stoutly maintaining that God alone was the true motive of faith, he insisted that this act could be objectively justified before the bar of reason in such wise as to refute adversaries and to prepare the way for inquirers to believe. In a passage of considerable apologetical import,<sup>97</sup> he lists the following ten reasons for the credibility of Holy Scripture:

1. *Praenuntiatio prophetica*, i.e., fulfilled prophecies;
2. *Scripturarum concordia*, i.e., the concordant teaching of the Scriptures, as contrasted with the disagreements of the philosophers;
3. *Auctoritas scribentium*, i.e., the claim of the writers to speak in the name of God;
4. *Diligentia recipientium*, i.e., the careful discrimination of the Church in drawing up the canon;
5. *Rationabilitas contentorum*, i.e., the harmony of the teaching of Scripture with the demands of reason and natural morality;
6. *Irrationabilitas errorum*, i.e., the evident unreasonableness and immorality of those who reject the Scriptures;
7. *Ecclesiae stabilitas*, i.e., the long duration of the Church according to the prediction of Christ to Peter (Lk 22:32) and in conformity with the criterion of Gamaliel (Acts 5:38-39);

8. *Miraculorum limpitas*, i.e., the miracles by which the world was converted to Christianity—including, most importantly, the great miracle of the conversion of the world (with reference to the often-cited text from Augustine's *City of God* 22.5);

9. *Testimonia non fidelium*, for example, the testimonies to Christ purportedly given by Flavius Josephus and by the Sibyl (Scotus here follows Augustine's *City of God* 18.23);

10. *Promissorum efficacia*, i.e., the fidelity with which God, as He has promised, gives light and consolation to those who sincerely inquire and adhere to the Christian faith.

#### *Henry de Haibuch din Langenstein(1325—1397)*

Henry of Hainbuch of Langenstein (1325—1397) provides even clearer outlines for an apologetical proof of the divine origin of the Christian religion. In an address that he delivered as rector of the University of Vienna on the Feast of St. Catherine of Alexandria, 1396, he set forth the following ten principles:

1. First, one should propose to him [the unbeliever] the first principle of the Catholic faith, namely that there is but one God, who is the last end and rewarder of all.

2. Then it should be proposed to the unbeliever. . . that God is all good and unimaginably perfect.

3. In the third place it should be proposed to the unbeliever that God is free with the freedom of contradiction, most powerful, most perfect, most wise, most truthful, incapable of being deceived or of deceiving, and immense without qualification.

4. Fourth, let it be proposed to him that if anything has been revealed by God, it is true.

5. . . . Let a man of holy and approved life, or several such, propose to the unbeliever that once there was a certain people who faithfully worshiped the one God of heaven and earth.

6. Sixth, let it be proposed that this people for a long period had eminent and very famous Prophets, signalized by various miracles, who predicted to this people what would happen to them and to other nations.

7. Seventh, let it be proposed that God in the Scriptures promised to send to the Jews and to all people one Savior.

8. Eighth, let it be proposed that this Savior has already come and long ago appeared in the world.

9. Ninth, let it be proposed to the unbeliever that this promised Savior was Jesus of Nazareth, whose birth was accompanied by many miracles and who Himself worked many and great miracles. . . .

10. Tenth and last, let His doctrine be proposed.

This outline reveals a high degree of systematization in the apologetical thought of Scholastic theologians at the end of the fourteenth century. What is most striking is the virtual abandonment of any effort to ground the act of Christian faith upon any serious examination of the credibility of the doctrine itself. Primacy is given to the extrinsic signs, prophecies, and miracles. Christianity is presented as a doctrine that must be accepted chiefly because of the signs that point to it from outside rather than because it answers any particular problems or felt needs. The history of apologetics has come a long way from Augustine and Aquinas, but the path has not been uniformly upward.

#### *Sec. 13-14, Apologeti misionari: 1250—1320*

##### Raymond Martini (1220 - 1285)

Martini's earliest known work, **Explanatio symboli apostolorum (1257)**, attempts to set forth the basic articles of Christian belief in a manner convincing to Jews and Saracens. Taking an Augustinian viewpoint not far removed from ontologism, he holds that discursive proofs for the existence of God

are superfluous. In 1267 Martini composed a polemical work, **A Muzzle for the Jews (Capistrum Judaeorum), Zabale pentru Evrei**, which somewhat impatiently exhorts the Jews to embrace Christianity. Deploring their evasive tactics in debate, as Peter of Blois had previously done, Martini holds that in refusing to give direct answers to the Christian arguments the Jews show themselves to be a stubborn and perverse people, rebellious to the Law of God as proclaimed by the Incarnate Son.

Martini's principal work, **The Dagger of the Faith (Pugio fidei)**, was completed in 1278. Shortly afterward he was assigned to teach Hebrew at the Dominican studium hebraicum in Barcelona, where he spent his declining years and died.

**The Pugio is an extraordinarily learned and ambitious treatise, enriched with innumerable quotations from the Hebrew Bible, the Talmuds (of both Jerusalem and Babylon), the Midrashim, and numerous sages of the Muslim world.** In his preface the author explains his aim and method. Since, as the ancients held, no plague is more injurious than the enemies of one's own household, Martini is principally concerned with winning over the Jews, who live in the Christians' very midst. He trusts that his "dagger" will serve to divide with them the bread of the divine word or, in the alternative, to destroy their impudent madness. The same weapon may be turned against the Saracens and other enemies of the faith.

The treatise is divided into three main parts.

#### **Part1**

**Part 1, introductory in nature, contains a series of theological dissertations on disputed questions: the existence of God, the end of man, the immortality of the soul, the creation of the world, God's knowledge of creatures, and the resurrection of the body.** In handling these speculative questions Martini shows no philosophical originality; he depends on Thomas Aquinas, and more particularly on the Summa contra gentiles. Martini's five proofs for the existence of God repeat those of Thomas almost to the letter. The lengthy discussions of the eternity of the world and of God's knowledge of creatures in their individual traits are reminiscent of **the debates with the Averroists at Paris.**

#### **Part2**

In the second part of his book Martini proves in ten chapters that the Messiah has already come. He bases his argument on four principal texts from the Hebrew Bible: the "seventy weeks" of Daniel (9:24-27), the promise of Genesis 49:10-12, the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel, chap. 2), and the oracle of Malachi (1:11). To these texts added testimonies from the Talmud are then subjoined. The final five chapters of Part 2 take up various rabbinic objections, namely, that Jesus did not save the Jews as predicted; that His crucifixion proves His incapacity to save others; that He failed to establish Himself as king and judge of all the nations; that He did not appear on the clouds of heaven; and that He did not gather the Jews from among the Gentiles. To each of these objections Martini replies by making distinctions and justifying them by reference to approved Jewish traditions.

#### **Part3**

Part 3, the longest portion of the treatise, is comprised of three sections. **The first of these attempts to prove the doctrine of the Trinity, not by a priori philosophical reasoning (as do Anselm and Richard of St. Victor, for example) but by biblical texts and Talmudic commentaries.** Section 2 deals with the creation of man, the Fall, and the Redemption. Section 3, still following the Hebrew Bible and tradition, gives arguments for the divinity of the Messiah. The final chapters of section 3 set forth some additional thoughts concerning the sacraments (baptism, penance, and the Eucharist), the Passion, death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ, the sending of the Holy Spirit, and the reprobation of the Jews. In his final chapter Martini asserts that the Jews as a people will remain ignorant of the truth until the end of time, only a small minority of them being converted and saved.

**The Pugio fidei merits respect as one of the most serious and erudite literary efforts to convert Saracens and Jews. Martini has mastered the Hebrew and Arabic languages and literature;** he quotes Hebrew texts in the original and approaches the Bible with exceptional respect for the original Hebrew

readings. But it does not seem that the *Pugio* made any great impression on Jewish or Arab readers. For the few Talmudic and Midrashic texts that Martini was able to twist to his purposes there were multitudes that spoke unfavorably of the Christian positions. The *Pugio fidei* holds an honored place among the apologetical efforts of the age of the Crusades; it served as an armory of texts and arguments for subsequent Christian apologists.

### Raymond Lull (c. 1235—1316)

The same missionary ardor that animated Raymond Martini is found in even greater intensity in his fellow Catalan Raymond Lull (c. 1235—1316).<sup>86</sup> This fascinating and romantic figure, having been born and raised in Majorca, married early and lived a somewhat profligate existence until converted by a mystical experience in his thirtieth year. He then **gave most of his goods to the poor**, abandoned his wife and children, and devoted himself to the study of **Latin, Arabic, and theology**. **A mystic and a man of prayer, a poet and a romancer, a logician and an apologist, a restless voyager in the service of Christ, he correctly described himself as “the procurator of the unbelievers” and as “a most fantastic man”**. In spite of his lack of a theological degree, he was several times invited to lecture on his doctrine at the University of Paris. **He made missionary expeditions to Asia, Africa, and Armenia, assisted at the Council of Vienne (1311—1312), and wrote upwards of two hundred books and brochures**. As an octogenarian he made his last missionary voyage to Tunis and Bugia, where he courted and obtained a martyr's death.

#### **Reason first, then faith**

Lull is chiefly famed, or ridiculed, for the “great art” that he sometimes called **ars compendiosa inveniendi veritatem**, a brief technique for finding truth. Essentially this was a means of using the memory in such a way as to exhibit combinations of truths that might otherwise be hidden. “For Lull himself, the great aim of the Art was a missionary aim. He believed that if he could persuade Jews and Moslems to do the Art with him, they would become converted to Christianity. For the Art was based on religious conceptions common to all the three great religions, and on the elemental structure of the world of nature accepted in the science of the time. Starting from premises common to all, the Art would demonstrate the necessity of the Trinity.”<sup>87</sup>

To facilitate this use of memory, Lull devised an elaborate set of diagrams with concentric circles and revolving figures. Lull himself was convinced that by the mastery of this method it would be possible to answer the most difficult questions of theology, morality, physics, and other areas to the satisfaction of Saracens, Averroists, and Jews as well as orthodox Christians. Modern students, however, confess their inability to put the method to any good use.<sup>88</sup>

In the realm of apologetics Lull's best contribution is perhaps to be found in some of his narratives embodying theological debates. In this class are his **Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men**, an allegorical disputation probably composed about 1273, involving a pagan philosopher, a Jew, a Christian, and a Saracen; also his *Book of the Tartar and the Christian* (about 1286), and the *Book of the Five Wise Men* (1293), which describes the efforts of a Latin, a Greek, a Nestorian, and a Jacobite to convert a Saracen. Lull's *Disputation of Ramon the Christian and Hamar the Saracen* (1308) records in substance an actual debate he had with a learned Moor while in prison for the faith in Bugia. In several allegorical dialogues, such as his *Dispute between Faith and Understanding* (about 1303) and his *Book on the Harmony between the Objects of Faith and Understanding* (1309) Lull propounds his views on faith and reason.

*Nothing if not ambitious, Lull was eager to debate with any adversary about the most recondite problems of theology. On several occasions he tells the allegedly true story of a Catholic friar who successfully convinced a Muslim king of the falsehood of Islam and then stopped short of proving the truth of Christianity on the ground that it was above reason. “You have done me a poor service,” says the king, “for while previously I was at least a Muhammadan, now I am neither a Muhammadan nor a Christian.”*

While some have argued that **Raymond was heretical in his failure to give due primacy to faith over reason, this charge is too severe.** In various writings he depicts the relationships differently, appealing to different metaphors. In general he insists that faith comes first in the order of time. But like Anselm and Richard of St. Victor, he was convinced that all the mysteries of faith could be supported by necessary reasons. If Lull was occasionally too confident in pressing his attacks against the infidel, this was, as Allison Peers puts it, “an excess of the enthusiast” and is not to be put down to a voluntary departure from the rule of faith.<sup>89</sup>

To conclude these remarks on the missionary friars at the end of the thirteenth century, brief mention should be made of the Florentine Dominican Fra Ricoldus de Monte Croce (d. 1320), who after years of apostolic labor in the Near East produced several controversial works, the best known of which goes by the title *Confutation of the Qur'an*.<sup>90</sup> This work, which has been called “the finest piece of anti-Moslem polemic in the Middle Ages”,<sup>91</sup> aims to demonstrate that the Law of Moses, not being confirmed by miracle and prophecy, is not the Law of God. The author admits, however, that the Muslims have many religious virtues that the Christians would do well to imitate. Along with Raymond Martini’s *Dagger of the Faith*, Ricoldus’s refutation became a popular sourcebook for later apologists. Martin Luther, who owned a copy, translated it into German.

### *Sec. 15: Dionysius din Carthusia, Nicholas de Cusa, Marsilio Ficino, Girolamo Savonarola, Grigore Palamas (1296-1359)*

#### Denis sau Dionysius din Carthusia (Dionysius) (1402-1471)

The leading Scholastic apologist of the fifteenth century was the Ecstatic Doctor, Dionysius (Denis) the Carthusian. Born at Ryckel in Belgium in 1402, he wrote prolifically on Scripture and Scholastic theology until his death in 1471. Eclectic in orientation, he combined a mastery and admiration of Thomas Aquinas, with leanings toward the Neoplatonizing mysticism of his namesake, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite.

Dionysius’s principal apologetical work is his *Dialogue concerning the Catholic Faith* (*Dialogion de fide catholica*)<sup>106</sup> composed about 1436. Somewhat in the fashion of Anselm’s *Cur Deus homo*, it is cast in the form of a discussion between a docile philosopher not yet a Christian, who asks questions and raises objections, and a wise theologian, who teaches and answers.

Book 1 is of decisive importance, since it brings the philosopher to the point of accepting the general stance of Christian faith. It begins with a discussion of the relations between faith and reason. The theologian explains that since faith is not a worldly form of wisdom it cannot proceed from self-evident principles but only from authority. The principles of Christian faith are the twelve articles of the Apostles’ Creed. In matters of revelation one moves not from understanding to acceptance but from acceptance to understanding—an echo of the Augustinian *nisi credideritis non intelligetis*, “unless you believe you shall not understand.”

The acceptance of Christian faith is, however, a reasonable and prudent act, because God authenticated the preaching of the Apostles by means of miracles. One can accept the veracity of the miracle stories about them because there is no other explanation of how ignorant and simple men, such as the Apostles are universally admitted to have been, could have converted the pagan world with its sophisticated philosophers. The theologian at this point pauses to expose the falsity of Avicenna’s naturalistic explanation of miracles through the influence of the stars, as well as of the magical and demonic interpretations. Then follows a refutation of polytheism and an insistence on the necessity of Christian faith (either explicit or implicit) for salvation. Book 1 closes with a brief mention of two additional proofs for the truth of Christianity, namely, the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and

the heroic virtue of so many faithful Christians. After this the philosopher courteously thanks the theologian for his convincing presentation of the preambles (*praeinducta, praelibata*) of faith.

In Books 2 through 6 the theologian and the philosopher discuss the individual doctrines of the faith—the one God, the Trinity, creation (including the standard issue of the eternity of the world), Christology, the Eucharist, the angels, and the Antichrist. Book 7 develops at length the proof from Old Testament predictions and refutes the “errors of the Jews”. Book 8, an ample apologetic from miracles, makes liberal use of medieval legends.

Dionysius is grossly incompetent in historical criticism. He mistakenly identifies his patron Dionysius with the Areopagite converted by Paul, even though Abelard had shown the impossibility of this identification centuries before. He delights in classifying the angels according to the nine orders set forth in the *Celestial Hierarchies* of Pseudo-Dionysius—classifications that the Areopagite, he thinks, proved beyond doubt to be divinely revealed. In Book 8 he narrates with relish how the Areopagite, after being beheaded for the faith, walked two miles carrying his head in his hands.

Quite evidently the *Dialogion* has small worth as an apologetic. Dionysius the Carthusian’s real concern was no doubt to instruct students of dogmatic theology concerning the relations between faith and reason. Dionysius shows considerable dexterity in proposing and answering in Scholastic form the most difficult metaphysical objections to doctrines such as the Trinity and the hypostatic union.

More properly apologetic in scope is Dionysius the Carthusian’s polemic in four books, *Against the Perfidy of Muhammad* (*Contra per-fidiam Mahumeti*),<sup>107</sup> composed shortly after the battle of Varna (1444) at the request of Nicholas of Cusa. This work is very negative in tone. Concentrating on the “errors of Muhammad”, it refutes the Qur’an chapter by chapter. This refutation is prefaced in Book 1 with a general demonstration of the truth of the Christian faith. Five main arguments are given: the miracles of Christ, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, the holiness of Christian life and doctrine, the definitive destruction of Jerusalem, and the expansion of Christianity in the face of persecutions.

The military successes of the Turks in the fifteenth century prompted many theologians to write treatises aimed at their conversion. In the East, Georgios of Trapezon composed about 1453 a respected book, *On the Truth of the Christian Faith to Amera the Muhammadan*. In the West Juan Cardinal de Torquemada, a Dominican, published about 1460 his *Against the Principal Errors of the Miscreant Muhammad and of the Turks or Saracens*.

### Nicholas de Cusa (1401—1464)

Among the creative theologians of this era who concerned themselves with the Islamic problem, the first place should probably be given to Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1401—1464). It was at his urging, as already mentioned, that his friend Dionysius the Carthusian wrote his **Contra perfidiam Mahumeti**. In the winter of 1453—1454, just after the fall of Constantinople, Nicholas, seeking to rouse himself from depression, composed his interesting dialogue, **On Peace or Concord in the Faith** (*De pace seu concordantia fidei*).<sup>109</sup> This work is a reverie, not an apologetic. It outlines what the author would consider the essentials of a world religion that could conceivably be adopted by all major groups—including pagans, Muslims, Jews, Tartars, and Hindus as well as Christians—if members of each would make all the concessions compatible with their conscientious commitments. The religious pact ultimately arrived at is a somewhat diluted version of Catholic Christianity. Nicholas’s work reflects a weariness with religious strife and a longing for universal harmony that relates him less to predecessors such as Abelard and Raymond Lull than to successors such as Jean Bodin and Leibniz.

In 1460—1461 Nicholas wrote his **Sifting the Qur’an (Cribratio Alchoran)**.<sup>110</sup> As the title indicates, it is an attempt to separate the good grain from the chaff rather than, as was then usual, simply to refute. Nicholas finds many points of agreement and attributes Muhammad’s rejection of Christianity largely to the fact that he knew it only in a decadent Nestorian form. After showing in Book 1 that the Qur’an

may be profitably used as an introduction to the truth of the gospel, Nicholas goes on in Books 2 and 3 to argue that the Muslims, on the basis of certain principles admitted by the Qur'an itself, should be prepared to accept the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the reality of Christ's death and Resurrection. Among the Islamic doctrines most deplored by Nicholas is the bestial sensuality he finds in the Qur'an's description of the joys of heaven.

In relation to most of his contemporaries, Nicholas of Cusa stands out as an exceptionally original and irenic thinker. Perhaps if apologetics had followed the lines indicated by Nicholas it would have spared itself much odium in later centuries.

### Marsilio Ficino (1433—1499)

Typical of the Italian Renaissance at its best is the apologetical work of Marsilio Ficino (1433—1499), the first head of the Platonic Academy at Florence. Convinced that he was called to do for Platonic philosophy what his recent predecessors of the Renaissance had done for poetry and painting, he translated into Latin the works of Plato, Plotinus, Porphyry, and Proclus as well as the *Corpus hermeticum* and the works of Pseudo-Dionysius. His principal philosophical achievement was his *Platonic Theology*, a work on the immortality of the soul in eighteen books (written 1469—1474). Having become a priest in 1473, he then wrote an apologetical work, *On the Christian Religion* (1474). In both these works he aims to bring *ratio platonica* to the support of Christian faith.<sup>111</sup> For him the “religious philosophers” of the ancient world were precursors of Christianity in much the same way as were the prophets of Israel. Plato, he believed, stood at the end of an inspired tradition handed down from Zoroaster, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, and Philolaus.

As Paul Kristeller points out<sup>112</sup> the question of God and of religion practically coincided for Ficino with that of the immortality of the soul. He believed that the tendency most distinctive to man, in contrast to beasts, is the natural desire for the contemplation of God. If this religious striving were void, man would be made imperfect by the very thing that raised him above the brute animals, which would be contradictory and absurd. But in the present life, this natural desire finds no complete fulfillment. Hence one may legitimately argue from this desire to the immortality of the soul, as Ficino does especially in Book 13 of the *Platonic Theology*. God and the soul that eternally adores Him are for Ficino the objective and subjective aspects of one and the same act; hence both are proved by the same argument.

The question of the immortality of the soul was of crucial apologetical importance in fifteenth-century Italy, since immortality was rejected by the two leading branches of Aristotelianism at Padua (the Alexandrist and the Averroist schools). Shortly after Ficino's death, the Fifth Lateran Council was to define in 1513 the immortality of the soul against Pietro Pompanazzi and others.<sup>113</sup>

Since the Aristotelian philosophers of the time were almost unanimous in denying the immortality of the soul and the utility of religion, Ficino was convinced that the revival of Platonic philosophy was necessary for the defense of the Christian faith. In the preface to his *On the Christian Religion*<sup>114</sup> he laments the divorce between philosophy and religion, which he says leads to impiety in philosophy and to ignorance in religion. The philosopher and the priest, he contends, were originally one and the same person. If this happy condition cannot be restored, philosophers should at least seek to penetrate divine mysteries with the help of religion, and priests, conversely, should esteem and cultivate philosophy.

All religion, in Ficino's view, is preferable to irreligion. The variety of religions is permitted by God and adds a certain luster to the beauty of the universe. But Christianity is the most perfect among religions and renders to God the most perfect worship.<sup>115</sup>

Grace, according to Ficino, is necessary for true blessedness, for the lower cannot by its own power raise itself to the form of the higher; it must be drawn from above. The Incarnation of the Word, in Ficino's system, is eminently suitable not only because it is the divinely perfect means of raising human

nature to the divine and of compensating for the offense of original sin but also because by it all creation can in some way be brought into union with its divine source. Man, according to Ficino, is a microcosm: he is like God in unity, like the angels in intellect, like the animals in sense, like the plants in nutrition, and like inanimate things through essence.<sup>116</sup> Thus the infinite goodness, in desiring to communicate itself to all things, had to do so through union with human nature. When humanity is divinized through the grace of Christ, the whole universe is in some sort raised up and sanctified.<sup>117</sup>

Apart from these elements, which are distinctive to the apologetics of Ficino, there are many traditional themes. He argues at length against the Jews on the basis of the prophetic texts of the Old Testament.<sup>118</sup> He insists likewise on the miracles of Christ, which he says are not denied by the Jews, the pagans, or the Muslims. He takes pains to show against contemporary superstitions that these miracles could not be due to the influence of the stars, a point already made by Eusebius.<sup>119</sup> To prove that miracles are not extinct, Ficino cites several recent incidents at Ancona and Florence.<sup>120</sup> He refutes Islam by tracing its errors back to Arianism and Manichaean docetism, which he then proceeds to refute by the traditional proofs from the divinity of Christ and the evidence for His death upon the Cross. Throughout his apology he speaks with great respect of pagan Platonists. He quotes the patristic commonplace that Plato was only “Moses speaking the Attic language”<sup>121</sup> and affirms that the Platonists “made use of the divine light of Christianity to interpret their divine Plato”.<sup>122</sup>

### Grigore Palamas (ca. 1296–1357)

Bennett, B. (2020). Gregory Palamas: Defending the Authority and Evidential Value of Religious Experience in Eastern Orthodoxy. In B. K. Forrest, J. D. Chatraw, & A. E. McGrath (Eds.), *The History of Apologetics* (pp. 266–268). Zondervan Academic.

Gregory Palamas (ca. 1296–1357) was one of the most important theologians of the Byzantine period, and his theological proposals have helped shape Eastern Orthodox theology in the modern period. Some of Gregory’s most influential apologetic works were written during an extended debate with a contemporary philosopher, Barlaam of Seminara. The debate began with a discussion of how faith and reason were related and, more specifically, whether logical arguments could establish with certainty what God is like and how he exists. Barlaam believed that created beings could have a true but limited knowledge of God, but he denied that logical demonstration could be used to prove that certain things were necessarily true of God. Gregory believed that the biblical understanding of faith required a far more robust sense of certainty than Barlaam’s account allowed. One could arrive at this kind of certainty, Gregory argued, only by seeing God act and being affected by God’s action; certainty thus depends on a personal experience of God. The debate between Gregory and Barlaam therefore shifted its focus; the central issue then became the authority and evidential value of religious experience. Gregory’s defense of the authority and significance of religious experience helped shape the character of later Byzantine and Eastern Orthodox theology.

#### *Historical background*

Gregory was born in Constantinople, probably in 1296.<sup>1</sup> His father was a member of the court of Emperor Andronicus II Palaeologus (r. 1282–1328) and also served as tutor for the emperor’s grandson, the future Andronicus III Palaeologus (r. 1328–1341). Although Gregory’s father died before Gregory turned seven, Gregory’s family continued to enjoy the favor of the emperor, and Gregory was able to secure a first-rate education from the renowned scholar Theodore Metochites (1270–1332).<sup>2</sup>

Around 1316 Gregory left the court and became a monk on Mount Athos in northeastern Greece. As the fourteenth century progressed, Mount Athos experienced an increasing number of raids by Turkish pirates, causing many monks to leave the area; this led to a decline in the quality of monastic life. In about 1326 Gregory himself left Mount Athos with eleven other monks and settled in Thessaloniki. He

was later ordained to the priesthood and became the leader of a monastic community in Veria, about forty miles west of Thessaloniki.

Due to repeated raids by “Illyrians” (i.e., the Albanian nomads of Thessaly), monastic life in Veria eventually became untenable, and by 1331 Gregory had returned to Mount Athos.<sup>3</sup> There he began to compose works that promoted the ideals of the monastic life as it was observed on Mount Athos, emphasizing the need for unceasing prayer as a means to union with God.<sup>4</sup>

### *Theological context*

Even though Gregory had withdrawn to a secluded place to pursue the monastic life, he was eventually drawn into a conflict that was taking place at the imperial court. This conflict was political in origin but had important religious implications. After losing several major battles with the Turks, Emperor Andronicus III had appealed to Pope Benedict XII for military assistance. The negotiations included discussions regarding the reunification of the Eastern (Greek Orthodox) and Western (Roman Catholic) churches. The proposal to reunite the churches was very unpopular in the Greek East. The need to secure military assistance was nonetheless so pressing that the emperor could not simply dismiss or ignore the discussions concerning the reunion of the churches that the pope demanded. A number of learned men connected with the imperial court protested vigorously against these discussions and composed works that opposed church reunion. Their works, however, showed that they did not all share the same assumptions, hindering the creation of a common front against the proposed reunification of the churches.

### *Barlaam of seminara: can one prove truths about god? Reason before faith...*

One of the principal contributors to the discussion of church reunion was Barlaam of Seminara (c. 1290–1348). Barlaam was born in southern Italy, where for centuries there had been a large Greek presence. After being ordained to the Orthodox priesthood, he traveled east to Constantinople, where he pursued philosophical studies before becoming a monk. Having gained favor at the imperial court, he was appointed to a position of monastic leadership and also held a post teaching philosophy to advanced students.

**In 1334 Barlaam began to devote much of his time to the question of church reunion, meeting with the envoys sent by Pope John XXII and later writing a series of treatises opposing the reunion of the churches.<sup>5</sup> Barlaam’s opinion carried significant influence, not only because he was a learned man and favored by the court but also because he understood the Latin language and had some knowledge of the theology of the Western church.**

Gregory also opposed the reunification of the churches but had reservations about the arguments Barlaam was advancing to support this position. Gregory was particularly concerned about Barlaam’s view of reason and Barlaam’s criticism of the use of rational proofs in theology.

Before examining why Gregory had reservations about Barlaam’s views, it will be helpful first to understand the original context of Barlaam’s arguments.<sup>6</sup> The envoys sent by the pope had criticized the way the Greek church understood the procession of the Holy Spirit. In making these criticisms, the papal envoys had advanced a number of syllogistic arguments drawn from the works of the scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas.<sup>7</sup> Aquinas had understood theology to be a demonstrative science, and the arguments cited by the papal envoys thus depended on a certain understanding of how one could reason deductively about the nature of God. Rather than refute each of the arguments the envoys had advanced, Barlaam felt that it would be easier to refute the assumptions on which his opponents’

arguments rested. Once these assumptions were seen to be false, any arguments based on these assumptions would be seen to fail as well.

Barlaam and the papal envoys agreed on the formal requirements for demonstrating the truth of a proposition but differed on whether truths about God could be demonstrated in this same manner. In Aristotelian logic, the conclusion of a syllogistic argument has been demonstrated (i.e., shown to be necessarily true) when the following conditions are met:

- (1) The premises of the argument, which affirm or deny something (a predicate) of something else (a subject), must be true and primary.<sup>8</sup>
- (2) A premise is primary when
  - (a) it is previously known as a fact and is indemonstrable,<sup>9</sup> and
  - (b) it precedes and causes the conclusion that follows from it, so that the latter is necessarily the case.<sup>10</sup>

As an example of a premise that is true and primary, Aristotle offered a universal geometrical truth: “The diagonal of a square is commensurable with the sides.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, for any square, the length of the diagonal of the square will be the length of the side of the square multiplied by the square root of two. If a geometrical figure is a square, then it follows necessarily that the diagonal of the square will be of just such a length.<sup>12</sup>

In Aristotle’s account, the capacity to prove that something is necessarily so depends on first grasping what is universal and previously known (i.e., not discovered by demonstration). But how does one grasp what is universal? Aristotle argued that while sight can look only at particular things, the mind can look beyond the particular thing to grasp the universal, i.e., that X is the case in all instances of Y, where Y are things that are of the same kind and have the same essence.<sup>13</sup> Universals therefore exist as concepts or principles in the mind, indicating what things are and how they come into being; as concepts, universals do not have an existence apart from the particular individual things which they define and explain.

**Barlaam accepted that Aristotelian logic could help human beings gain a systematic understanding of how the created world was structured. He doubted, however, that it could help one understand the nature of the uncreated God or arrive at certainty about divine matters. Aristotelian logic was concerned to examine created things and grasp the axioms and ratios that define and bring about things of a certain kind.** God, however, is superior to all created things. What God is, Barlaam argued, exceeds the limits of our senses and can never be fully comprehended by created minds. Aristotle’s account of grasping the universal by abstraction from sensible objects cannot help one understand a God who is unseen and immaterial and exceeds all the limited conceptions we might try to apply to him.

Furthermore, Barlaam noted, Aristotle’s account of universals aimed to identify the features that characterize members of a class. God, however, is not one member of a broader class of beings that can be called “God.” There is only one particular individual who is God, and the attributes of God belong to him alone. Aristotle had accepted that a definition could be given that fit all the members of a class (e.g., one could give a definition of what a human being is, specifying the characteristics that every human being will necessarily possess). Aristotle nonetheless held that one could not give a definition of a particular individual man, e.g., Socrates; the attributes that make Socrates an individual are idiosyncratic and subject to no general rule.<sup>14</sup> Now if there is no definition for an individual (showing what must necessarily be the case in all instances), neither can there be any demonstration in the case of individuals (showing what necessarily follows and must always be the case). Thus, Barlaam argued,

Aquinas and the Latin envoys were mistaken in thinking one could use demonstrative syllogisms to prove anything regarding the nature of God; just as their method was flawed, so too were the conclusions they drew from this.

### *Apologetic response and methodology*

#### **Gregory Palamas: One Can Prove Truths about God, but These Proofs Presuppose Experiential Knowledge of God**

Barlaam's argument was carefully reasoned and initially appeared to offer an effective criticism of the papal envoys' assumptions and method of argumentation. Like Barlaam, Gregory believed that the logic applicable to created realities had limited value in establishing what the uncreated God is like. Still, the direction taken in Barlaam's argument and the consequences this might have for certainty in matters of faith troubled Gregory. If one could show that a proposition was necessarily true, then one could know with certainty that what the proposition asserts will always be true. But if, as Barlaam affirmed, one cannot show that statements about God are necessarily true, does this mean that one can no longer know with certainty what God is like? And if one cannot know with certainty what God is like, would it still be possible to have a true and lasting faith? Perhaps Barlaam's argument was so conditioned by Aristotelian thought that Barlaam risked giving up things that were important to the Christian faith. If faith is indeed "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see" (Heb 11:1), then surely one must be able to have certainty regarding what has been taught concerning God (cf. Luke 1:4).

At the time of the conflict between Gregory and Barlaam, some philosophers at the imperial court were discussing the limitations of what could be known by sense-perception and whether one could affirm with certainty the truth or falsity of statements about the objects of sense-perception.<sup>15</sup> Gregory may have understood Barlaam's discussion of the limits of what can be demonstrated to be a sign of a broader skeptical stance, i.e., as casting doubt on what could be known about God or even what could be known at all.<sup>16</sup>

As a monk and an advocate for spiritual renewal, Gregory believed that it was important to affirm that one could know God and arrive at certain knowledge of God.<sup>17</sup> If one sought a knowledge of God that was true and primary (i.e., knowable before and apart from demonstration) and could lead to certainty, this could come only from personal experience of seeing God act.<sup>18</sup> By directly perceiving God's action, one could move beyond the shifting and conflicting reasonings advanced by supposedly enlightened philosophers.<sup>19</sup> One should therefore accept as primary and certain the testimonies of those who have been inspired by God (the authors of Scripture) and the teachings of those whose minds were enlightened by God and moved by the Holy Spirit (the Holy Fathers).<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, through self-denial and prayer, one should seek to gain a similar personal, experiential knowledge of God, for only a mind enlightened by God can understand what the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers have taught.

### *Hesychasm and Gregory's Argument for the Authority of Religious Experience*

Gregory's arguments for the authority of religious experience presupposed a specific model of prayer that was gaining increasing influence in monastic circles during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. This model of prayer, called "hesychasm," was particularly influential on Mount Athos, the monastic center that had played an important role in Gregory's own spiritual formation.<sup>21</sup>

**Hesychasm represented a development of certain teachings on prayer and religious experience that had been advanced by Evagrius of Pontus, one of the Desert Fathers who had lived in Egypt at the end of the fourth century AD. Evagrius had divided the spiritual training of monks into two stages.**

### ***Isihasm – etapa 1***

In the initial stage, one became aware of the evil reasonings and disordered desires that led one to sin, and began to fight against these.

### ***Isihasm – etapa 2***

Later, through vigilance and discipline, one was able to rise above the distractions created by mental pictures of things one craves or fears and sinful reasonings about how one ought impulsively to respond. Evagrius taught that in this later stage, one became able to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17), focusing one's undivided attention on God without being diverted by distractions. As one continued in unceasing prayer, one's mind could begin to perceive God's gracious action toward the world in a way that was analogous (but superior) to sense-perception.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Perceperea lui Dumnezeu ca lumina***

Evagrius held that in this state, God's gracious action could be perceived as light, for Scripture testifies that God is light (1 John 1:5) and that he dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16).<sup>23</sup> Only when one's mind was illuminated by God could one begin to know God, Evagrius argued, for it is written, "In your light we see light" (Ps 36:9) and "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory" (2 Cor 4:6).

Evagrius's teaching remained popular among the hesychast monks of the Byzantine period.<sup>24</sup> To help focus the mind and maintain uninterrupted prayer, hesychast monks also made use of certain practical helps. First, a short phrase, based on Scripture and appealing for the help of Christ, was continually repeated throughout the day (e.g., "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me"). This practice of "monologistic prayer" (prayer using the repetition of a single phrase) had already been recommended by Evagrius and other Desert Fathers of the late fourth and early fifth centuries. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, certain visualization and breathing exercises were added.<sup>25</sup> In these exercises, the person praying was to see the mind descending to the heart and resting there. This descent signified the mind's concentration of its attention on God and the stilling of all the functions of the mind by which mental pictures, concepts, and discursive reasonings had formerly been produced.<sup>26</sup>

The hesychast monks believed that purification from sinful reasonings and illumination by God were part of a process by which God renewed sinful human beings and made them partakers of the divine nature (2 Pet 1:4).<sup>27</sup> When the mind was illuminated by God's grace, it was filled with divine light and remained attached to the good, in spite of outward hardships and temptations.<sup>28</sup> In the same way that two people are united in marriage, the uncreated divine light fused itself with the soul and, by dwelling in the soul, caused the soul to participate in its divine qualities.<sup>29</sup> Because of the soul's union with the body, the body itself was also illuminated and transformed by God's grace.<sup>30</sup> This divine illumination and transformation of the soul and body was shown to the apostles when Christ was transfigured (Matt 17:2; Mark 9:2); in the Transfiguration, the divinity of Christ was seen as an uncreated light that glorified the body conjoined with it.<sup>31</sup>

### ***Barlaam's Criticism of Arguments Based on Religious Experience***

Barlaam was skeptical of the hesychast monks' claim that they had gained an experiential knowledge of God, a claim that Gregory had endorsed. The hesychast monks, Barlaam argued, say they have seen a divine light and sensed a warmth or certain movements within their bodies.<sup>32</sup> God, however, does not have a bodily existence, so he cannot be perceived with the senses in the way that the monks claim. It is clear then, Barlaam argued, that what the monks saw was not God himself but merely a created light that their senses were adapted to perceive.<sup>33</sup> In the same way, any warmth or movements that the monks felt within their bodies did not represent unmediated contact with God. If not a result of purely natural causes, such sensations were only created effects that occurred when God acted indirectly on the physical world through the mediation of the angels.<sup>34</sup> In conclusion, Barlaam

argued, no one should claim to have seen God with bodily eyes, for such a teaching is contrary to reason and accepted only by heretical movements whose beliefs the church has condemned.<sup>35</sup> In 1337 Barlaam publicly denounced hesychastic teaching as unorthodox and appealed to the Standing Synod in Constantinople to condemn it, but the Synod declined to act.

Although Barlaam's criticisms were not directed at Gregory, they did raise doubts about whether personal religious experience could be treated as authoritative and whether it could lead to certain knowledge of God, as Gregory had claimed. Gregory later came to Thessaloniki and in 1338 to 1340 wrote a series of treatises (the Triads) defending the hesychast monks against Barlaam's criticisms.<sup>36</sup>

### *Gregory's Defense of the Authority and Significance of Religious Experience*

In the Triads, Gregory argued that the monks' claims to have seen and directly experienced God were true; experiences of this type provided knowledge of God that was certain and did not need to be justified by any independent process of rational demonstration. Barlaam's criticisms were unjustified. Barlaam had posited a sharp distinction between God and created things but had given an inadequate account of how God mediated his grace to the created world.

In biblical literature, God is described as being surrounded by glory (Ezek 1:27–28) and sending forth light (Ps 43:3); this glory and light belong to God and reveal his presence and character (Deut 5:24; 2 Chron 5:14; Ezek 8:4; 10:19; 11:22; 28:22; 43:2; 1 Tim 6:16; 2 Pet 1:17; Rev 15:8; 21:11, 23).<sup>37</sup> Even though God is by nature invisible (Col 1:15; 1 Tim 1:17; 6:16), he makes it possible for us to see his glory (Ezek 8:4; Acts 7:55), which we perceive as light (Ps 36:9; Acts 22:11). Since this light belongs to God and reveals his presence and power, this light is truly divine and uncreated.<sup>38</sup>

Rather than focusing on the distinction between what God is (God's essence) and what created things are, as Barlaam did, one should instead make a distinction between God's essence (i.e., the properties that make him God and that no other beings can possess) and God's activities (those aspects of God's life and power by which God creates, preserves, rules over, and transforms all other beings).<sup>39</sup>

It is true, Gregory admitted, that created minds can never fully comprehend God's essence; i.e., all the peculiar properties that make God who God is.<sup>40</sup> For example, how could a created mind know what it meant for God to be infinite or immaterial? Words such as infinite and immaterial tell one only that God is free from limits but not how God exists in his freedom from limits. God exists in a way that transcends every conception we might form of God, and we cannot share in these unique features of God's existence.

In spite of our limitations as created beings, God nonetheless wishes to show us something of his nature by the way he acts. These activities are not separate from God but are expressions of God's life and represent his power to bring things into existence and give them life.<sup>41</sup> Since the power to bring things into existence and give them life belongs to God alone, God's activities must be regarded as fully divine and not, as Barlaam thought, merely effects brought about in the created realm.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, these activities are an eternal and inalienable part of God's existence, for no essence is without its activity;<sup>43</sup> God could no more be without his activity than one could be a human being without being alive.

Gregory argued that God's gracious action toward us gives us life and draws us into communion with him so that we are able to know and share in his goodness, wisdom, and holiness. Although we cannot share in those things that make God uniquely who he is (his essence), God's activities make it possible for us to share in every good quality God possesses that is not unique to his own individual existence.<sup>44</sup> The hesychast monks' claim that they had directly perceived God was true, Gregory argued; unmediated contact with God not only provides certain knowledge of God but also allows human beings to participate in God's goodness and to be transformed into God's likeness.

### *The Aftermath of the Controversy between Gregory and Barlaam*

Gregory was able to gain support for his position from the monks of Mount Athos, and this led to Barlaam being condemned by the Patriarchal Synod in 1341.<sup>45</sup> Between 1341 and 1347, Gregory nevertheless had to defend himself against other opponents who felt that the language Gregory had used to distinguish between God's essence and activity was incautious.<sup>46</sup> By distinguishing between incommunicable properties peculiar to God and activities by which God shared his communicable properties with other beings, Gregory seemed to be teaching that there was a fundamental division in God between a superior form of divinity (God's transcendent essence) and an inferior form of divinity (God's self-communication to lesser beings through his activities).<sup>47</sup> Gregory's opponents argued that, in making these distinctions, Gregory had failed to adequately affirm the oneness of God.<sup>48</sup> During these years, which coincided with a major political conflict and a civil war within the Byzantine Empire, Gregory fell from political favor and was imprisoned.

At the conclusion of the civil war, Gregory was exonerated and appointed to a senior ecclesiastical position, becoming metropolitan of Thessaloniki. Gregory then produced a detailed defense of the distinction he had made between God's essence and activity (the One Hundred and Fifty Chapters).<sup>49</sup> Although the philosopher Nicephorus Gregoras and a number of bishops continued to oppose Gregory's teaching, a synod convened in 1351 endorsed the principal features of Gregory's position.<sup>50</sup>

As the polemics against his theology subsided, Gregory was able to devote most of his time to preaching and pastoral work. After being briefly imprisoned by the Turks in 1354–1355, Gregory died in 1357 and was proclaimed a saint of the Greek church in 1368.<sup>51</sup>

### *Contributions TO THE FIELD OF APOLOGETICS*

Gregory's apologetic works had a significant influence on later Byzantine and Eastern Orthodox theology. As the Byzantine Empire drew to a close, Gregory's defense of hesychasm and his distinction between God's essence and activities helped Orthodox Christians define their identity and respond to the alternative approaches taken by Catholicism and Protestantism.<sup>52</sup> Although Gregory's influence waned during the post-Byzantine period, there was a revival of interest in his works in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>53</sup>

Gregory's work has been appreciated by contemporary Orthodox theologians because Gregory did not make Christian theology narrowly dependent on some preconceived account, drawn from non-Christian sources, of what is reasonable or logical. In rejecting Aristotelian philosophy and scholastic theology, which was concerned to show the harmony of faith and reason, Gregory wished to make faith the sole basis for knowing anything of God's nature. Faith, Gregory argued, is necessary if one is to know God, and there can be no real knowledge of God apart from religious commitment.<sup>54</sup>

For Gregory, what confirms and validates faith is a certain kind of religious experience that involves perceiving and being affected by God's action.<sup>55</sup> Gregory described this spiritual perception of God's action as being analogous in some respects to sense-perception, but superior to the latter. Gregory noted that a logical demonstration is not required to establish that objects of sense-perception exist and have certain qualities. The same, he argued, is true in the case of spiritual perception; logical demonstration is not needed to establish that the objects of spiritual perception exist and have certain properties. Furthermore, since logical demonstration need not precede religious experience, the study of logic should not be regarded as essential to the life of faith.<sup>56</sup> Neither, he argued, was it necessary to validate religious experience by reference to some prior conceptions imposed by human reason.

Authentic experience of God, Gregory contended, can nonetheless be seen to have certain characteristic features. First, since it is written that the pure in heart will see God (Matt 5:8), the person claiming to have this experience must have worked to combat sinful thoughts, root out vices, acquire the virtues, and engage in unceasing prayer.<sup>57</sup> Second, the person must have previously stilled the

functions of the mind by which mental pictures, concepts, and discursive reasonings were produced. Otherwise, any perceptions could reasonably be assumed to arise from the recipient's own mind and not from God's action.<sup>58</sup> Third, the experience of God must be so qualitatively different from sense-perception and intellectual perception that it could only be explained by God's supernatural action.<sup>59</sup> The hesychast monks had often held that perceiving God's uncreated light might be accompanied or followed by miraculous phenomena such as foreknowledge of future events and the gift of healing.<sup>60</sup> Gregory accepted this but placed greater emphasis on the qualitative and quantitative differences discernable in the objects of spiritual perception themselves (e.g., the light that is seen is limitless, infinite in extension, and able to comprehend all things while itself transcending comprehension by the mind and the senses).<sup>61</sup>

In conclusion, the extended debate with Barlaam led Gregory to develop a systematic account of the Christian life that emphasized the authority and evidential value of religious experience.<sup>62</sup> This model regarded faith and religious commitment (expressed through spiritual struggle and unceasing prayer) as the only way to attain certain knowledge of God's nature. This knowledge arose from contact and union with God and was produced by God's unmediated action, transcending the natural human faculties of sensation and reason. Gregory's account of mystical union and the immediate and certain knowledge of God that transcends reason has sometimes been compared to Western medieval traditions of contemplative prayer.<sup>63</sup>

Gregory's account thus differed in important ways from the Western medieval tradition of scholastic theology, which aimed to be a demonstrative science that showed the harmony of faith and reason. In Gregory's view, it is not necessary to validate Christian teaching by reference to human reason since true knowledge of God transcends the limits of sense-perception, concepts, and discursive reasoning. Although one might be able to demonstrate the coherence of Christian doctrines to the unconverted, such a demonstration would not be sufficient to bring about the mind's conversion and return to God. Conversion and transformation occur only when God graciously acts supernaturally on a person, creating incontrovertible certainty and producing a holy life. In the end, this holy life is the best apologetic for the truth of the faith.<sup>64</sup>

## *Concluzii*

At no time did the Middle Ages have ideal conditions for the development of apologetical theology. From the sixth to the eleventh century the general level of culture was so low, and the social conditions were so unsettled, that theology had no real opportunity to establish itself as a science. From the eleventh century onward, Catholicism was so much in possession and so tied up with the political and cultural life of the West that there was little occasion for successful communication with those of other faiths. Some efforts were made, especially in formal religious disputations, to discover the real points of controversy between Christians and Jews. A few scholars spent countless hours poring over rabbinic texts. But these contacts were too rare, too narrow, too artificial to lead to anything like the free and fruitful exchange that had occurred among Stoics, Platonists, and Christians in the patristic age.

Apologetics against the Saracens suffered from an even greater cultural distance. While one must admire the assiduity of a Raymond Martini and the quixotic enthusiasm of a Raymond Lull, it seems clear that their apologetics failed to hit the mark. Western theologians were viewing the Muslim faith through Western eyes and failing to meet it as a living religion. In two areas medieval apologetics made signal progress. First, from Anselm on, the Scholastic theologians explored with great subtlety the relations between faith and reason. If they did not reach any agreed solution, they did develop a multitude of carefully chiseled theories, some more successful than others. The mediating positions of St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure continue to provide living options for the apologetical theologian today.

Second, some of the more reflective theologians of the Middle Ages, including Abu Qurrah and Abelard, opened up truly original perspectives on comparative religion. Looking upon Christianity as one among many great religions, they were able to grasp the underlying unity of the several faiths and to raise the question of God's approach to mankind through various religions. In the fifteenth century Nicholas of Cusa and Marsilio Ficino carried this approach still further.

Medieval apologetics rose to its highest level in the thirteenth century, with the *Summa contra gentiles* of Thomas Aquinas. Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Scholasticism failed to maintain the same level of speculative vigor. The later Scholastics made some pertinent observations about the extrinsic signs of revelation, but they failed to translate their theories into thorough apologetical treatises. Doubtless the undeveloped state of textual criticism and of historical science at the time would have made it impossible to construct a full-blown apologetic for Christianity through miracles, prophecies, and other historical signs of revelation. This approach, which became prevalent in the nineteenth century, fits well with the theory of credibility worked out by the Scholastics of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Whereas patristic apologetics capitalized chiefly on the successes of the Church, medieval apologetics profited rather from the reverses of Christendom. In the thirteenth century the failure of the Crusading movement, together with the incursion of Arabic philosophy into the West, aroused thinkers such as Aquinas to build their giant syntheses. Then in the fifteenth century the fall of Constantinople and the sudden infatuation of the humanists with pagan antiquity afforded the needed impetus for Christian apologetics to break out of its Scholastic mold. Nicholas of Cusa and Ficino, addressing the new world of their day, put aside the heavily dogmatic preoccupations of their medieval predecessors and dealt with revealed religion as a divine gift. Their keen appreciation of human and religious values and of the place of Christianity within humanity's total religious striving made them effective interpreters of the faith for their own day and gave their ideas meaning and power for generations yet to come.