

**Science and God:
The Attitude of the Catholic Authority
Towards the Science of Today**

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Francis Bacon (1561-1626) opened the age of Science by his well-known slogan : “Knowledge is power”. By the word “knowledge” he meant the scientific knowledge or empirical knowledge earned through the methodology initiated by him.

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) developed the Baconian Knowledge to the crucial point which the authority of the Church of those days could not tolerate without fear of jeopardizing the belief in God.

Before him Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) a Polish and Catholic priest astronomer circulated in 1531 a manuscript *Commentariolus* which gained approval from Pope Clement VII and was developed into a book and published in 1543 with the famous title of *On the Revolutions of Celestial Orbits*. By this book he earned the position of the founder of Copernican Heliocentrism, though his explanation was still discussable.

In 1608 a Dutchman, Hans Lippershey of Middleburg (1570-1619) invented a telescope. When Galileo heard of it a year later, he began to make three for his own use, the largest of which made the objects appear about 1,000 times larger and 30 times closer. Through his telescopes, Galileo found out that the moon was full of mountains and valleys, the Milky Way consisted of countless stars, the planet Jupiter had four moons revolving around it. He reported his spectacular discoveries in his book entitled *Starry Messenger* published in 1610 with the dedication to Cosimo II the Grand Duke of Tuscany, a friend of his family. The Grand Duke was so satisfied that he appointed Galileo ducal philosopher and mathematician with an annual benefit of 1,000 gold florins. He moved to live in a villa of Arcetri near Florence to continue his research of the sky under the protection of his friend the Grand Duke.

However, Galileo was attacked by the conservative theologians of the day that his so-called discoveries supported Copernican astronomy which was suspected to contradict the teaching of the Bible, for examples:

Joshua addressed Yahweh and said in the sight of all Israel: “Sun, stand still at Gideon, and you, moon, in the valley of Aijalon.” And the sun stood still and the moon stopped...(Joshua 10: 10-13)

God fixed the earth upon its foundation, not to be moved forever.
(Psalm 103:5)

The sun rises and the sun goes down; then it passes on to the place where it raises. (Ecclesiastes 1:5)

Since then a hot controversy broke out in the Catholic Church about whether the New Astronomy contradicted the Biblical Teaching. A Dominican Father Tommaso Caccini strongly condemned the New Astronomy. A Carmelite Father Paolo Antonio Foscarini (1565-1616) tried to reconcile the Copernican system with the Bible. Cardinal Robert Bellarmine(1542-1621) took the compromising and prudent way saying in 1615 that the Copernican system saved the appearances better than the Ptolemaic and therefore could be considered a superior hypothesis, it was still not established as a fact; so one is not allowed to interpret the Scriptures contrary to the common agreement of the Fathers of the Church. To contradict their exegesis was to oppose the truth of the Scriptures themselves.¹

In the same year 1615, Galileo presented his stance in *A letter to the Grand Duchess Christina*, that the Bible was not meant to teach science and when referring to the physical world the sacred writers used the common conception of the Universe in order to avoid confusing the minds of their readers and making them suspicious of the religious truths that the Holy Texts were meant to convey.² However he was

¹ See L. Callan, “Galileo Galilei”, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1981), vol.6, p.253.

² Cf. *loc. cit.*

recommended by the Holy Office which put Copernicus' book in the *Index of Prohibited Books* in 1616, to consider the Copernican theory as hypothesis only and not to try to prove it. But 6 years later (1632) he published *Dialogue on the two Great World Systems*, in which he roused a great controversy as he openly defended the Copernican theory. Cardinal Francesco Barberini, nephew of Pope Urban VIII (Barberini), his friend, tried to help him by moderating the punishment as less as possible: he was confined under the house arrest in Florence for the rest of his life and he died there in 1642. The book was put into the *Index of the Prohibited Book*, and its author was summoned to Rome and placed on trial in 1633. "While dealt with respectfully and not mistreated, he was compelled under threat of torture to recant. Pope Urban VIII (his friend) at the urging of his nephew Cardinal Francesco Barberini, made certain that Galileo was not harmed and that his confinement was a comfortable one. After several months, he was released, and he returned to Florence. He published in 1638 a third book *Dialogue Concerning Two New Sciences*, a thorough examination of motion and a refutation of Aristotelian physics."³

Upon hearing about Galileo events, Rene Decartes (1596-1650) preferred to enjoy his research in a more peaceful atmosphere of a protestant country as Holland rather than to risk an adventure in France his catholic native country . Nevertheless, to reassure any incidental difficulty, "The publication of his *Treatise on the World* was suspended because of the condemnation of Galileo, and the work was not published until after his death in 1677."⁴

After Galileo's death in 1642, controversy went on with more and more on Galileo's favour and "nonetheless the science progressed together with the physical astronomy, taking into consideration only the scientific publications between 1650-1700 by such intellectuals as Gassendi, Borelli, Hooke, Huygens, Leibniz, Halley and last but not least Newton."⁵ In 1741 Galileo's book was deleted from the *Index*, and that of Copernicus in 1757.

³ Matthew Bunson, *Encyclopedia of Catholic History* (Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor Pub., 1995), p.345-6.

⁴ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (New York: Image Books, 1963) p.75.

⁵ Pierre de Vregille, "Galilee" in *Dictionnaire Apologetique* (Paris: Beauchesne editeur, 1928), vol.7, p.192.

In the mean time the liberal protestants agreed on the point that knowledge is one and so the teaching of the Scriptures could not disagree with the laws of nature discovered by the scientific method. This attitude grew in number in all famous universities of Europe, so much so that some of them subjected all the Christian teaching under the criteria of scientific method. Pope Pius IX (ruled 1846-78) called the First Vatican Council in 1870 to condemn them under the names of Fideists, Rationalists and Naturalists.

The scientists outside the Catholic Church were not afraid of the condemnation. They augmented their resources to attack more directly the beliefs of the catholics such as:

- Heinrich Paulus (1760-1850)
- David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74)
- Christian Baur (1808-82)
- Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930)
- Willam Wrede (1859-1906)
- Julius Welhausen (1844-1918)
- Renan (1823-92)
- Reimarus (1694-1768)
- Johann Solomo Semler (1752-91)

Pope Leo XIII issued an *Encyclical Aeterni Patris* (which means “of the Eternal Father”)⁶ to urge the catholic scholars to study the philosophy of St.Thomas Aquinas as the official philosophy of the catholic church, and the *Encyclical Providentissimus Deus* (The Most Provident God) to encourage the biblical scholars to use the historical method to find out the meaning from the Scriptures.

Many catholic scholars responded too enthusiastically as to deny the supernatural inspiration of the Bible, so they were condemned by Pope Pius X in the *Encyclical “Pascendi Domini Gregis”* (To Care the Sheep of the Lord) in 1907 under the name of modernism, for example:

⁶ “An Encyclical” is an open-letter sent to all the dignitaries of the Catholic Church by the pope and assumes the name from the first two or three words of each encyclical.

- Louis Duchesne (1846-1922)
- Alfred Loisy (1857-1940)
- Maurice Blondel (1861-1949)
- George Tyrrell (1861-1909)
- Edouard Le Roy (1870-1954)
 - Laberthonni (1860-1932)
 - George Tyrrell (1861-1909)

The result was that too many bright catholics preferred safety to taking adventure with a risk. The non-believers took the opportunity to attack the catholic church and Christianity in general under the label of the obstacle to human progress and as unhumanistic.

In 1943 Pope Pius XII issued an *Encyclical Divino Afflante Spiritu* (By the Inspiring Divine Spirit) to allow the catholic scholars using the modernist method to study Christianity, provided that the articles of faith remain intact. Neo-Thomism rose up as a response. Seven years later in 1950 another *Encyclical Humani Generis* (Of the Human Race) allowing the Darwinian Evolution to be adopted in Christian philosophy, provided that it was not to be believed as the only possible hypothesis. Neoscholasticism showed up with more confidence.

On January 25, 1959, Pope John XXIII proclaimed that the Catholic Church needed aggiornamento (updating), resulting in convening the Vatican Council II during 1962-5.

On October 31, 1992 Pope John Paul II publicly declared that the Church had erred in its judgment and a report by a special commission investigating the matter stated: “The philosophical and theological qualifications wrongly granted to the then new theories about the centrality of the sun and the movement of the earth were the result of a transitional

situation in the field of astronomical knowledge and of an exegetical confusion regarding cosmology. Certain theologians, Galileo's contemporaries, being heirs of a unitarian concept of the world universally accepted until the dawn of the 1600s, failed to grasp the profound, nonliteral meaning of the Scriptures when they describe the physical structure of the created universe."⁷

Lastly on September 14, 1998, the present pope John Paul II issued the *Encyclical Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason). This is the last document of our study, so we shall stay on it long enough to spot out the actual "Attitude of the Catholic Authority Towards the Science of Today."

There are remarkable points in it. We should therefore first scrutinize main characters of this pontiff's life, then survey the main ideas of the *Encyclical* before we set out to comment on the *Encyclical*.

Pope John Paul II, the Philosopher

Karol Wojtyla, the first Polish pope and the first non-Italian pope since 1523, was born in Wadowice from a poor family. He studied literature, philosophy and theology and was ordained priest in the Catholic church in 1946. He went to earn the doctorate degree of Theology in Rome. He then taught philosophy in Jagiellon, Cracow, and Lublin. While he was a professor of philosophy, he wrote a manual of philosophy in Polish for the use of his lectures which was later translated into English and published in the series of "Analecta Husserliana" in the year 1979, and while he was a cardinal he presented a paper of the title "Participation or Alienation" to the Fourth International Phenomenology Conference, held in Fribourg, Switzerland, on March 27, 1975. He was elected pope on October 16, 1978. He has shown his ability as philosopher and

⁷ *Encyclopedia of Catholic History*, p.346.

theologian by issuing many scholarly documents of learned characters as *Redemptor Hominis*, 1979 (The Redeemer of Mankind); *Sapientia Christiana*, 1979 (the Christian Wisdom); *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979 (To teach Religion); *Dominum Vivificantem*, 1986 (The Life-giving Lord); *Veritatis Splendor*, 1993 (The Splendor of Truth); *Tertio Millennio Adveniente*, 1994 (The third Millennium Approaching).

The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought recognizes his connection with Phenomenological School saying “Max Scheler (1874-1942) was associated with phenomenology, as was Edith Stein (1891-1942) a carmelite nun, who was to die in Auschwitz in 1942 and recently declared a saint by John Paul II; the movement’s characteristical emphasis on the human person has had an influence on the writings, and even the official declarations, of Pope John Paul II, who as a young priest had chosen Scheler as his subject for an academic dissertaion.”⁸ In 1987 the same pope in the beatification ceremony of Edith Stein during his visit to West Germany commended her for what Prof. Kathleen Haney of Houston University called her phenomenological virtues: “In keeping with her intellectual abilities, she did not want to accept anything without careful examination, not even the faith of her fathers. She wanted to get to the bottom of things herself. As such, she was engaged in a constant search for the truth.”⁹

Krystyna Gorniak-Kocikowska of the Southern Connecticut State University, commented on connection of Pope John Paul II to the Phenomenological School of Philosophy thus:

Another scholar whose philosophy and charismatic personality attracted students to Phenomenology was Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II). Wojtyla was introduced to phenomenology by his philosophy professor, Roman Ingarden. Next to him, Tadeusz Styczen and Jozef Tischner... The phenomenology of Styczen and Tischner has been formed in the tradition of Jacques Maritain (1870-1973), the French existentialist, and Scheler, under the heavy influence of Karol Wojtyla. Many young scholars continue this tradition...

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.568.

⁹ Kathleen Haney, “Edith Stein”, in *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Pub., 1997), p.679.

Wojtyla promoted Maritain's existential humanism. Karol Wojtyla's occupation with Scheler's philosophy contributed to this interest immensely. Wojtyla was one of the most important Polish phenomenologists, even before he became pope. His election to the Holy See only magnified interest in his philosophy among Polish scholars. Numerous works are devoted to his philosophical views, and even more are written in the spirit of his philosophy. Wojtyla's phenomenology, focusing on the ethical and metaphysical status of a person as well as his theory of action is strongly influenced by Thomas Aquinas. This combination of Thomism and phenomenological anthropology and ethics is visible in many works of Polish philosophers in the 1980s and 1990s...

Karol Wojtyla's interest in Maritain contributed very strongly to the popularity of his philosophy in Poland... In general, the direction provided by Karol Wojtyla is continued by his disciples and by the young generation of scholars trained by them. This is today the strongest current in Polish Phenomenology.¹⁰

And Jan Czerkawske concluded his philosophy in this succinct statement:

In phenomenological circles one also finds Karol Wojtyla (later Pope John Paul II), whose personalism combines the philosophy of being in the existentialist Thomistic spirit with the philosophy of subject in the spirit of classical phenomenology."¹¹

Main Ideas from the *Encyclical Faith and Reason*

Introduction: Know Yourself

The Encyclical opens with the admonition carved on the temple portal at Delphi of ancient Greece "Know Yourself". By it the pope admonishes the catholic scholars, not to claim themselves the knowers, the teachers and the refuters of all

¹⁰ Krystyna Gorniak-Kocikowska, "Poland", in *Encyclopedia of Phenomenology*, pp.537-543.

¹¹ Jan Czerkawaske, "Philosophy in Polan", in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. vol.7, p.487.

knowledge that is not theirs, but to go along with all others in quest of knowledge, regardless of sources such as the Veda and the Avesta, Confucius and Lao-Tze, Tittankara and Buddha, Homer and Euripides, Plato and Aristotle, etc. He asks all who set sails on the same journey to reject the culture of agnosticism, relativism and scepticism in favor of pluralism.

Chapter I: The Revelation of God's Wisdom

The Encyclical marks out the characteristics of Christian reason as based on revelation which always remains mystery. As mystery revelation cannot be limited by reasonable enquiries and is not necessarily against them. Faith understood and implemented in the right way should enlarge the horizons of freedom and wisdom.

Chapter II: I Believe That I may Understand

This does not mean that one should absolutely start learning by believing the revelation. It is natural that reason provides fundamental knowledge and develops it in an infinite space. But the knowledge is always limited and always subject to further extension. Christian faith extends to some area unknown to reason within the accepted infinite space. There are faiths of other kinds that extend to areas also unknown to reason within also the accepted infinite space. The chapter ends with the conclusion: "Here we see not only the border between reason and faith, but also the space where the two meet." (No. 23)

Chapter III: I Understand That I May Believe

Revelation can never be understood perfectly on its own account, but can be understood more and better through the understanding of religious truths "which we find in the answers which the different religious traditions offer to the ultimate questions." (No. 30)

"Religious truths are to some degree grounded in Philosophy." (No. 30)

"Philosophical truths are grounded, in their turn, on the scientific researches." (No. 30)

Chapter IV: The Relationship Between Faith and Reason

The pope proposed St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-74) “as **a master** of thought and **a model** of the right way to do theology... as **a pioneer** of the new path of philosophy and universal culture.” (No. 43)

From these words we can observe that Aquinas is cited as one of the masters of Today Catholic Theology and one of the pioneers of Today Catholic Philosophy. Aquinas is cited as an example of those who like to walk in the middle way, avoiding “the exaggerated rationalism” and “mistrust with regard to reason itself” (No. 45) Aquinas in fact is chosen among the thinkers of the middle way who represent a wide range of varieties. One can observe that the Encyclical does not keep the scholastic formula: “Philosophy is the handmaid of Theology”, but preserves its autonomy within the range of the middle way and announces the new policy about the relation between philosophy and theology: “This is why I make this strong and insistent appeal – not, I trust untimely – that faith and philosophy recover the profound unity which allows them to stand in harmony with their nature without compromising their mutual autonomy.” (No. 48)

Chapter V: The Magisterium’s Interventions in Philosophical Matters

In this chapter, the attitude of the pope in the name of the catholic church and the attitude of the church authority is clearly stated, such as:

The church has no philosophy of her own nor does she canonize any one particular philosophy in preference to others. (No. 49)

It is the Church’s duty to indicate the elements in a philosophical system which are incompatible with her own faith. (No. 50)

The Magisterium’s interventions are intended above all to prompt, promote and encourage philosophical enquiry...no historical form of philosophy can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth, nor to be the complete explanation of the human being, of the world and of the human being’s relation with God.” (No. 51)

Catholic theologians and philosophers, whose grave duty it is to defend natural and supernatural truth and instill it in human hearts, cannot afford to ignore these more or less erroneous opinions. Rather they must come to understand these theories well. (No. 54)

A number of Catholic philosophers who, adopting more recent currents of thought and according to a specific method, produced philosophical works of great influence and lasting value...who sought to combine the demands of faith with the perspective of phenomenological method. From different quarters, then, modes of philosophical speculation have continued to emerge and have sought to keep alive the great tradition of Christian thought which unites faith and reason.” (No. 59)

The Chapter concludes with clear statements of attitude of the present day catholic church, thus:

From this comes the Magisterium’s duty to discern and promote philosophical thinking which is not at odds with faith...to restore a harmonious and creative relationship between theology and philosophy...what link, if any, theology should forge with the different philosophical opinions or systems which the world of today presents.” (No. 63)

Chapter VI: The Interaction Between Philosophy and Theology

The chapter begins with the statement that implies all the doings of a competent theology of today: “The word of God is addressed to all people, in every age and in every part of the world; and the human being is by nature a philosopher.” (No. 64) From this statement it is clear that any system of human philosophy can serve the universal theology in one way or other, but how to implement each particular opinion, so that result might not be “at odds with faith” is another question.

Chapter VIII: Current Requirements and Tasks

This chapter revives the attitude of the second Vatican Council about the philosophical truth, thus: “Intelligence is not confined to observable data alone. It can with genuine certitude attain to reality itself as knowable, though in consequence of sin that certitude is partially obscured and weakened.” (No. 82 from *Gaudium et Spes*, No. 15)

About the current issue Postmodernism which is one of the derived trends of Phenomenology, the pope gave both encouragement and warning. The whole paragraph is worthwhile to be quoted:

Our age has been termed by some thinkers the age of “postmodernity”. Often used in very different contexts, the term designates the emergence of a complex of new factors which, widespread and powerful as they are, have shown themselves able to produce important and lasting changes. The term was first used with reference to aesthetic, social and technological phenomena. It was then transposed into the philosophical field, but has remained somewhat ambiguous, both because judgement on what is called “postmodern” is sometimes positive and sometimes negative, and because there is as yet no consensus on the delicate question of the demarcation of the different historical periods. One thing however is certain: the currents of thought which claim to be postmodern merit appropriate attention. According to some of them, the time of certainties is irrevocably past, and the human being must now learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral. In their destructive critique of every certitude, several authors have failed to make crucial distinctions and have called into question the certitudes of faith.

It means, therefore, that Postmodernism is encouraged on the condition that it does not lead to nihilism or any conclusion that might be “at odds with faith”, otherwise it might be the latest current that might also “keep alive the great tradition of Christian thought which unites faith and reason” (No. 59)

Conclusion of the Encyclical

The conclusion is full of words of encouragement to philosophers as a particular vocation in the Church.

The Church remains profoundly convinced that faith and reason “mutually support each other”; each influences the other...to pursue the search for deeper understanding. (No. 100)

The intimate bond between theological and philosophical wisdom is one of the Christian tradition's most distinctive treasures in the exploration of revealed truth. This is why I urge them (Christian theologians and Christian philosophers – the presenter) to recover and express to the full the metaphysical dimension of truth in order to enter into demanding critical dialogue with both contemporary philosophical thought and with the **philosophical tradition in all its aspects**, whether consonant with the word of God or not.” (No. 105)

The grave responsibility to provide for the appropriate training of those charged with teaching philosophy both in seminaries and ecclesiastical faculties must not be neglected. (No. 105)

The Church follows the works of philosophers with interest and appreciation; and they should rest assured for her respect for the rightful autonomy of their discipline.” (No. 106)

I cannot fail to address a word to *scientists*. In expressing my admiration and in offering encouragement to these brave pioneers of scientific research, to whom humanity owes so much of its current development, I would urge them to continue their efforts.” (No. 106)

Comment and Conclusion of the Presenter

The *Encyclical Faith and Reason* was released on the 12th anniversary of the actual Pope John Paul II's Pontificate. As a philosopher and theologian himself we can believe that what he expressed in this *Encyclical*, he has pondered it along his life time as a university student, a university instructor and a scholar pontiff. I agree with Dr. Alessandra Stanley's observation that it “is one of his most personal pronouncement, a crystallization of his philosophical and theological thinking over a life time”¹² and that of Monsignor Lorenzo Albacete a professor of theology at St. Joseph's seminary in Yonkers: “This is what the Pope would have been doing with his life if he had never become Pope.”¹³

¹² “Pope calls on World to Unite Faith and Reason” in *The New York Times* 16 October 1998, p.A1

¹³ “Pope calls on Modern World to End the Fateful Separation” in *op. cit.*, p.A10

Moreover the Pope seems to encourage pluralism while emphasizing the development of Thomism and Neoscholasticism and implicitly condemning the two extremisms that can hardly reconcile with pluralism – nihilism and fideism. Both of them have no trust in reason. The atheists and the non-believers are rather persuaded to join the journey of research for the absolute.

The harmony between faith and reason is the first emphasis of this Encyclical.

The second emphasis is the interdependent between Philosophy and Theology. Philosophy is no more the handmaid or the slave of Theology, but both have particular roles of their own dignity. They help each other to reach particular objective of each, though they have the same goal ahead, that is the search for truth which is manifested in many aspects.

The third and last but not least is the invitation to collaboration by dialogue of mutual respect and trust, among philosophers as well as among the philosophers, theologians and scientists of the broadest sense.

From this study, the presenter would like to suggest to the UTI to launch also a program of philosophical study (in addition to the scientific study that she is doing) in the most up-to-date manner, so that the UT may be also understood through the most up-to-date philosophical method; and then to expose it to the international philosophers as another new inspiration for the people in the globalizational age who yearn for peace and collaboration at all levels.

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ABSTRACT

The Catholic Church professes a religion of faith, and derives its faith from the Bible. The Bible never claims to teach science but can be interpreted so. That is the sad experience of the Catholic Church at the threshold of the Modern Era. The Catholic Authority was not ready at that crucial moment to distinguish Faith and Science. When Science was given the honor to be identical with Faith, it became competitor with Faith which by its nature has no human strategy effective enough to guarantee its survival. In panic the Catholic Authority recurred to violence. The more violence it exerted, the more loss it suffered, until its authority became neglected in the international diplomacy. Fortunately the Catholic Authority of the last century knew how to take over the “kenosis” from Jesus’ example. When Pope John Paul II took apology for the case of Galileo on October 31, 1992 he regained prestige for the Catholic Church in the Academic World, when he proclaimed on March 12, 2000 the Universal Reconciliation, he regained for the same Church the prestige in the International diplomacy, and when he announced the Sunday of October 15, 2000 as the Jubilee of the **True Family Day**, without resenting that this word has been used before by Rev. Moon and such events have been provoked regularly many years before with participation from most of faiths and nations, more than 200,000 people from various nations and faith joined the pope in St. Peter Square and promised to promote the **True Families** all over the World.

We have many lessons to learn from this presentation and our UTI has a role to develop it for the Peace of Mankind.