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Thomas Aquinas on the Nature and Scope of Sacred Doctrine

Summa Theologiae

Part I, Question 1. The Nature and Extent of Sacred Doctrine

To place our purpose within proper limits, we first endeavor to investigate the nature and extent of this sacred doctrine. Concerning this there are ten points of inquiry:

- 1 Whether it is necessary?
- 2 Whether it is a science?
- 3 Whether it is one or many?
- 4 Whether it is speculative or practical?
- 5 How it is compared with other sciences?
- 6 Whether it is the same as wisdom?
- 7 Whether God is its subject-matter?
- 8 Whether it uses arguments?
- 9 Whether it should use metaphorical or figurative language?
- 10 Whether the Sacred Scripture of this doctrine may be expounded in different senses?

Article 1. Whether, besides philosophy, any further doctrine is required?

Objection 1: It seems that we need no teaching beyond the philosophical disciplines. For man should not seek to know what is beyond reason: "Seek not the things that are beyond you".¹ But whatever is not beyond reason is sufficiently dealt with in the philosophical disciplines. Therefore any other teaching beyond the philosophical disciplines seems to be superfluous.

Objection 2: Further, knowledge can be concerned only with being, for nothing can be known, except what is true; and being and truth are convertible. But the philosophical disciplines deal with all beings – even God Himself; so there is a part of philosophy that is called theology, or divine science, as Aristotle has proved.² Therefore there is no need for any teaching other than what can be gained from the philosophical disciplines.

1 Ecclesiasticus 3: 22.

2 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* VI, 1, 1026a19.

On the contrary, "All Scripture inspired by God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness."³ Now Scripture, inspired by God, is no part of philosophical disciplines, which are the invention of human reason. Therefore it is useful to have a divinely inspired science besides the philosophical disciplines.

I answer that, It was necessary for man's salvation that there should be a doctrine based on divine revelation besides the philosophical disciplines pursued by human reason. Primarily, because man is directed to God, as to an end that surpasses the grasp of his reason. As Isaiah says, 'Without you, God, no eye has seen what you have prepared for those who love you.'⁴ But the end must first be known by those who are to direct their thoughts and actions to the end. Hence it was necessary for the salvation of humans that certain truths which surpass human reason should be made known to them by divine revelation. Indeed, it was necessary that man should be taught by a divine revelation even those truths about God which human reason could have discovered; because the truth about God that reason could discover would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors. But man's whole salvation, which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of humans might be brought about more aptly and more surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation. It was therefore necessary that besides the philosophical disciplines pursued by reason there should be a sacred doctrine obtained through revelation.

Reply to Objection 1: Although those things which are beyond man's knowledge may not be pursued by man through reason, nevertheless, once they are revealed by God, they must be accepted by faith. Hence, the same passage continues, "You are shown many things that are above the understanding of human beings."⁵ And sacred doctrine consists in these things.

Reply to Objection 2: Sciences are differentiated according to the different formal aspects under which they consider their subjects. For the astronomer and the physicist both may prove the same conclusion, for instance, that the earth is round. But the astronomer does so by means of a mathematical middle term,⁶ i.e. one that abstracts from matter, whereas the

3 2 Timothy 3: 16.

4 Isaiah 64: 4.

5 Ecclesiasticus 3: 25.

6 The 'middle term' in question is a term shared by the premises of a demonstrative syllogism. A syllogism is an argument consisting of two premises that share one term, the middle term, and whose conclusion is formed by joining the other two terms, the so-called 'extremes', of the premises. For example, in the demonstration 'Every body whose all projections are circular is round; but the earth is a body whose all projections are circular (as is clear from its shadow cast on the moon); therefore, the earth is round', the middle term is 'a body whose all projections are circular', and it is obviously a geometrical middle term, which abstracts from matter (since it applies to any body on account of its shape, regardless of its matter, whether it is ivory or resin (as in billiard balls), or any other solid matter. On the other hand, in the syllogism 'A body whose all parts gravitate toward the same point on account of their gravity is round, but the earth is a body whose all parts gravitate toward the same point on account of their gravity; therefore, the earth is round', the middle term is obviously a physical middle term that involves in its meaning the consideration of the gravitating matter of the earth. These demonstrations have been widely referred to in medieval philosophy as illustrations of typical scientific demonstrations (used by Aristotle in his *Physics* and *On the Heavens*). So much for the Enlightenment propaganda, still being taught in American high schools, that medievals believed the earth was flat.

physicist by means of a middle term that involves the consideration of matter. So there is no reason why those things that the philosophical disciplines deal with insofar as they are knowable by the light of natural reason should not also be dealt with by another doctrine, insofar as they can be learned by the light of divine revelation. Hence the theology that pertains to sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is a part of philosophy.

Article 2. Whether sacred doctrine is a science?

Objection 1: It seems that sacred doctrine is not a science. For every science proceeds from self-evident principles. But sacred doctrine proceeds from articles of faith which are not self-evident, since their truth is not admitted by all. As 2 *Thessalonians* says, ‘not all have faith.’⁷ Therefore, sacred doctrine is not a science.

Objection 2: Further, there is no science of singulars. But sacred doctrine is about singulars, such as the deeds of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the like. Therefore, sacred doctrine is not a science.

On the contrary, Augustine says that ‘to this science alone pertains that which generates, nourishes, protects, and strengthens the faith that saves us.’⁸ But this can be said of no science except sacred doctrine. Therefore sacred doctrine is a science.

I answer that, Sacred doctrine is a science. We must bear in mind that there are two kinds of sciences. There are some which proceed from principles known by the natural light of understanding, such as arithmetic and geometry and the like. There are some which proceed from principles known by the light of a higher science: thus the science of perspective proceeds from principles established by geometry, and music from principles established by arithmetic. Sacred doctrine is a science in this second way, because it proceeds from principles established by the light of a higher science, namely, the science of God and the blessed. Hence, just as music relies on principles taught by arithmetic, so sacred science relies on principles revealed by God.

Reply to Objection 1: The principles of any science are either in themselves self-evident, or reducible to the recognition of a higher science; and such, as we have said, are the principles of sacred doctrine.

Reply to Objection 2: Sacred doctrine deals with singulars, not because it is concerned with them principally, but they are introduced rather as examples to be followed in our lives (as in moral sciences) and in order to establish the authority of those men through whom the divine revelation, on which this sacred scripture or doctrine is based, has come down to us.

Article 3. Whether sacred doctrine is one science?

Objection 1: It seems that sacred doctrine is not one science; for according to the Philosopher “that science is one which deals with subjects of one and the same genus.”⁹ But creator and creature, which are both dealt with in sacred doctrine, are not subjects of one and the same genus. Therefore sacred doctrine is not one science.

7 2 *Thessalonians* 3: 2.

8 St Augustine, *De Trinitate* XIV, 7. PL 42, 1037.

9 *Posterior Analytics* I, 28, 87a38.

Objection 2: Further, in sacred doctrine we deal with angels, corporeal creatures and human morality. But these belong to separate philosophical sciences. Therefore sacred doctrine cannot be one science.

On the contrary, Holy Scripture speaks of it as one science: "Wisdom gave him the science of holy things".¹⁰

I answer that, Sacred doctrine is one science. The unity of a faculty or habit is to be gauged by its object, not materially, but with regard to the formal aspect under which it is the object. For example, people, donkeys and stones all agree in the same formal aspect of being colored; and color is the formal object of sight.¹¹ Therefore, because Sacred Scripture considers things precisely under the formal aspect of being divinely revealed, all divinely revealed things share the same formal aspect of the object of this science, and therefore they are subsumed under sacred doctrine as under one science.

Reply to Objection 1: Sacred doctrine does not deal with God and creatures equally, but with God primarily, and with creatures only insofar as they are related to God as their origin or end. Hence the unity of this science is not compromised.

Reply to Objection 2: Nothing prevents lower faculties or habits from being diversified by something that falls under a higher faculty or habit as well; because the higher faculty or habit regards the object under a more universal formal aspect. For example, the object of common sense [*sensus communis*] is anything that affects the senses, including, therefore, everything that is visible or audible. Hence, although the common sense is one faculty, it extends to all the objects of the five senses.¹² Likewise, objects that are the subject-matter of different philosophical sciences can yet be dealt with by one and the same sacred science under the same formal aspect, namely, insofar as they are divinely revealed. So, in this way, sacred doctrine is like an imprint of the knowledge God itself, which is one and simple, yet extends to everything.

Article 4. Whether sacred doctrine is a practical science?

Objection 1: It seems that sacred doctrine is a practical science; for according to the Philosopher 'a practical science has action as its end.'¹³ But according to the letter of *James*, sacred doctrine is directed to action: 'Be doers of the word and not only hearers.'¹⁴ Therefore sacred doctrine is a practical science.

¹⁰ Wisdom 10: 10.

¹¹ That is to say, all these very diverse subjects fall under the same cognitive faculty, namely, sight, insofar as they are all colored, i.e., visible, perceivable by sight. These subjects are diverse "materially" as opposed to the same "formal" aspect they all share, namely, their being colored (and hence visible), just as all, bearing balls and billiard balls and other round objects share the same form, namely, round shape, even if they are materially diverse, for some are made of steel, other of ivory or resin, etc.

¹² In Aristotelian psychology, the common sense is an inner sense, the sensory faculty that has the task of monitoring the activity of the five external senses, making us aware of our perceptions, distinguishing, organizing, and further processing the "raw input" of the external senses. Therefore, the objects of the common sense are all sensible objects, insofar as they are sensible in general, comprehending all the more specific objects of the external senses, namely, all visible, audible, tangible, etc. objects.

¹³ *Metaphysics* II, 1, 993b21.

¹⁴ *James* I: 22.

Objection 2: Furthermore, sacred doctrine is divided into the Old and the New Law. But law pertains to moral science which is practical. Therefore sacred doctrine is a practical science.

On the contrary, Every practical science is concerned with what humans can do or make; as moral science is concerned with human actions, and architecture with buildings. But sacred doctrine is chiefly concerned with God, who makes people [rather than is made by them]. Therefore, sacred doctrine is a theoretical science, rather than a practical one.

I answer that, As I have already said,¹⁵ sacred doctrine, while it is one and the same, extends to things which belong to different philosophical sciences, because it considers each under the same formal aspect, namely, insofar as they can be known through divine revelation. Hence, although among the philosophical sciences one is theoretical and another practical, nevertheless sacred doctrine covers both; just as God knows both Himself and His works, by one and the same knowledge. Still, sacred doctrine is theoretical rather than practical, because it is concerned with divine things rather than with human actions. It deals with the latter insofar as they lead us to the perfect knowledge of God in which eternal bliss consists. And from this the answer to the objections is clear.

Article 5. Whether sacred doctrine is nobler than any other science?

Objection 1: It seems that sacred doctrine is not nobler than other sciences; for the nobility of a science depends on the certitude it establishes. But other sciences, the principles of which cannot be doubted, seem to be more certain than sacred doctrine; for its principles – namely, articles of faith – can be doubted. Therefore other sciences seem to be nobler.

Objection 2: Furthermore, a lower science depends upon a higher; as music depends on arithmetic. But sacred doctrine does in a sense depend upon philosophical sciences. As Jerome observes: “the ancient doctors so enriched their books with the ideas and phrases of the philosophers, that you do not know which to admire more: their secular erudition or their scriptural learning.”¹⁶ Therefore sacred doctrine is inferior to other sciences.

On the contrary, Other sciences are called the handmaidens of this one: “Wisdom sent her maids to invite to the tower.”¹⁷

I answer that, Since this science is partly speculative and partly practical, it transcends all others, speculative and practical. One speculative science is said to be nobler than another, either by reason of its greater certitude, or by reason of the higher worth of its subject-matter. This science surpasses other speculative sciences in both of these respects: in certitude, because other sciences derive their certitude from the natural light of human reason, which can err, whereas this derives its certitude from the light of divine knowledge, which cannot be misled; in the higher worth of its subject-matter, because this science deals with those things that by their sublimity transcend human reason; while other sciences consider only those things that are within reason’s grasp. Among practical sciences that one is nobler which is ordained to a further purpose, as politics is nobler than military strategy; for the good of the army is subordinated to the good of the state. But the purpose of this science, in so far as it is practical, is eternal bliss; to which the purposes of every practical

15 Ia. 1: 3.

16 St Jerome (c. 345–420), *Epistola* 70. PL 22, 668.

17 Proverbs 9: 3.

science are subordinated as to their ultimate end. Hence it is clear that from every standpoint, sacred doctrine is nobler than all other sciences.

Reply to Objection 1: It may well happen that what is in itself the more certain appears to us the less certain on account of the weakness of our intelligence “which is dazzled by the clearest objects of nature; as the owl is dazzled by the light of the sun.”¹⁸ Hence the fact that some happen to doubt the articles of faith is not due to the uncertain nature of those truths, but to the weakness of human intelligence. Still, even the slightest knowledge that may be obtained of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge obtained of lesser things.¹⁹

Reply to Objection 2: This science can in a sense depend upon the philosophical sciences, not as though it stood in need of them, but only in order to make its teaching clearer. For it accepts its principles not from other sciences, but immediately from God, by revelation. Therefore it does not depend upon other sciences as upon higher sciences, but makes use of them as subsidiaries and as handmaidens, even as the master arts make use of their subordinate arts, as politics uses military strategy. That it thus uses them is not due to its own defect or insufficiency, but to the defect of our intelligence, which is more easily led by what is known through natural reason (from which the other sciences proceed) to things that are beyond reason (as are the teachings of this science).

Article 6. Whether this doctrine is wisdom?

Objection 1: It seems that this doctrine is not wisdom. For no doctrine that borrows its principles from elsewhere is worthy of the name of wisdom; given that “the office of the wise is to govern others, and not to be governed by them.”²⁰ But this doctrine borrows its principles, as was said earlier.²¹ Therefore this doctrine is not wisdom.

Objection 2: Furthermore, it pertains to wisdom to prove the principles of other sciences. Hence it is called ‘the chief of the sciences’.²² But this doctrine does not prove the principles of other sciences. Therefore it is not wisdom.

Objection 3: Furthermore, this doctrine is acquired by study, whereas wisdom is acquired by divine inspiration, so that it is numbered among the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (as is clear from Isaiah²³). Therefore this doctrine is not wisdom.

On the contrary, at the beginning of the Torah *Deuteronomy* says “This is our wisdom and understanding in the sight of the peoples.”²⁴

I answer that, This doctrine is wisdom above all human wisdom; not merely in any one field, but absolutely. Since it belongs to the wise man to command and to judge, and since lesser matters should be judged in the light of some higher principle, he is said to be wise in any field who considers the highest principles of that field. For example, in architecture, the artist who plans the form of the house is called wise and the architect, as opposed to

18 *Metaphysics* II, 1, 993b10.

19 *On the Parts of Animals* I, 5, 644b31.

20 *Metaphysics* I, 2, 982a18.

21 Ia. 1: 2.

22 *Nicomachean Ethics* VI, 7, 1141a16.

23 Isaiah 11: 2.

24 *Deuteronomy* 4: 6.

the subordinate craftsmen who hew the timbers and cut the stones: 'Like a wise architect, I have laid the foundation.'²⁵ Again, in matters of human life, the prudent man is called wise, inasmuch as he directs his acts to a fitting end: 'Prudence in a person is a form of wisdom.'²⁶ Therefore, he who considers absolutely the highest cause of the whole universe, namely God, is called wise most of all. Hence wisdom is said to be the cognition of divine things, as Augustine says.²⁷ But sacred doctrine most appropriately deals with God as the highest cause; not only with regard to what can be known about Him through creatures, which philosophers have recognized (see *Romans*: 'What is known of God is plain to them'²⁸), but also with regard to what only He knows about Himself and communicates to others by revelation. Hence, sacred doctrine is especially called wisdom.

Reply to Objection 1: Sacred doctrine takes its principles not from any human knowledge, but from divine knowledge, through which, as through the highest wisdom, all our knowledge is set in order.

Reply to Objection 2: The principles of other sciences either are self-evident and cannot be proved, or are proved by natural reason in some other science. But the knowledge that is proper to this science comes through revelation and not through natural reason. Therefore it has no concern to prove the principles of other sciences, but only to judge of them. So, anything that in the other sciences is found contrary to any truth of this science must be condemned as false "destroying counsels and every height that rears itself against the knowledge of God."²⁹

Reply to Objection 3: Since judgment pertains to wisdom, there are two kinds of wisdom, corresponding to two kinds of judgment. A man may judge in one way by inclination, as anyone who possesses some virtue correctly judges what should be done in accordance with that virtue on account of his very inclination to do it. This is why Aristotle says that the virtuous person sets the measure and standard for human acts.³⁰ In another way, man may judge by knowledge, just as a man educated in moral science might be able to judge correctly about virtuous acts, if though he may not have the virtue. The first manner of judging divine things belongs to that wisdom which is set down among the gifts of the Holy Spirit: "The spiritual person judges all things."³¹ And Dionysius says that 'Hierotheus was taught by the experience of divine things, not only by learning about them.'³² The second manner of judging belongs to this doctrine insofar as it is acquired by study, though its principles are obtained by revelation.

Article 7. Whether God is the subject of this science?

Objection 1: It seems that God is not the object of this science. For every science has to presuppose the knowledge of what its subject is, according to Aristotle.³³ But this science

25 1 Corinthians 3: 10.

26 Proverbs 10: 23.

27 *De Trinitate* XII, 14. PL 42, 1009.

28 Romans 1: 19.

29 2 Corinthians 3: 10.

30 Nicomachean Ethics X, 5, 1176a17.

31 1 Corinthians 2: 15.

32 Dionysius the Areopagite (c. 500), *De divinis nominibus* II, 9. PG 3, 648.

33 *Posterior Analytics* 1, 4, 71a13.

cannot presuppose knowledge of the essence of God, since, as Damascene remarks, 'In God's case, it is impossible to say what he is.' So, God is not the subject of this science.³⁴

Objection 2: Furthermore, anything concerning which a science determines certain truths must be comprised under the subject of that science. But Sacred Scripture determines truths not only concerning God, but also concerning many other things, such as creatures and human morality. Therefore God is not the subject of this science.

On the contrary, The subject of a science is what this science is talking about. But this science is talking about God, because it is called *theology*, that is, "talk about God".³⁵

I answer that, God is the subject of this science. For a science is related to its subject as a habit or faculty to its object. Now strictly speaking, that is the object of a faculty or habit under the formal aspect of which all things are referred to that faculty or habit, as man and stone are referred to the faculty of sight insofar as they are colored. Hence the proper object of sight is something colored [as such]. But in sacred science, all things are dealt with under the aspect of God; either because they are God Himself or because they refer to God as their beginning and end. Hence it follows that God is truly the subject of this science. This is clear also from the principles of this science, namely, the articles of faith, for faith is about God. But the subject of the principles is the same as that of the whole science, since the whole science is virtually contained in its principles. Some people, however, looking at the diverse things dealt with in this science, and not at the aspect under which they are dealt with, have assigned differently the subject of this science – that is, either as things and signs; or as the works of salvation; or as the whole Christ, as the head and members. For this science does deal with all these things; however, it deals with all of them insofar as they are related to God.

Reply to Objection 1: Although we cannot know what God is, nevertheless in this science we use His effects (whether of nature or of grace) in place of a definition to demonstrate what we consider about God within this doctrine; even as some philosophical sciences demonstrate something about a cause from its effect, by taking the effect in place of a definition of the cause.

Reply to Objection 2: Any other things determined in this sacred doctrine are comprised under God, not as parts or species or accidents, but as things that are in some way related to Him.

Article 8. Whether sacred doctrine uses arguments?

Objection 1: It seems that this doctrine should not use arguments. For Ambrose says: "Cast arguments aside where faith is sought."³⁶ But in this doctrine, faith especially is sought: "But these things are written that you may believe".³⁷ Therefore, sacred doctrine should not use arguments.

Objection 2: Further, if it does use arguments, then the argument is either from authority or from reason. If the argument is from authority, then the reasoning seems to be unbefitting

³⁴ St John Damascene (c. 655–c. 750), *De fide orthodoxa* I, 4. PG 94, 797.

³⁵ The word 'theology' has as its roots the Greek words 'theos' meaning 'God' and 'logos' meaning 'talk, reason, reasoning, discipline'.

³⁶ St Ambrose (c. 339–397), *De fide catholica* I, 13. PL 16, 370.

³⁷ John 20: 31.

the dignity of this doctrine, for according to Boethius authority is the weakest ground of proof.³⁸ But if it is from reason, then the process is unbecoming its end, because, for according to Gregory, 'Faith has no merit where the reason presents actual proof from experience.'³⁹ So, sacred doctrine does not use arguments.

On the contrary, The Scripture says that a bishop should "embrace that faithful word which is according to doctrine, that he may be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to convince the gainsayers."⁴⁰

I answer that, Just as other sciences do not argue to prove their principles, but argue from their principles to demonstrate other truths in these sciences: so this doctrine does not argue to prove its principles, which are the articles of faith, but it goes on to prove something else from them; as the Apostle argues to prove the general resurrection from the resurrection of Christ.⁴¹ However, we should bear in mind in regard to the philosophical sciences that the inferior sciences neither prove their principles nor dispute with those who deny them, but leave this to a higher science; whereas the highest of them, viz. metaphysics, can dispute with someone who denies its principles, if only the opponent will make some concession; but if he concedes nothing, it can have no dispute with him, although it can answer his objections. Hence Sacred Scripture, since it has no science above itself, can dispute with one who denies its principles, if the opponent admits some at least of the truths obtained through divine revelation; thus we can argue with heretics from texts in Holy Scripture, and against those who deny one article of faith, we can argue from another. But if the opponent believes nothing of divine revelation, there is no longer any means of proving the articles of faith by reasoning, but only of answering his objections – if he has any – against faith. However, since faith rests upon infallible truth, and since the contrary of a truth can never be demonstrated, it is clear that the arguments brought against faith cannot be demonstrations, but are difficulties that can be answered.

Reply to Objection 1: Although arguments from human reason cannot avail to prove what must be received on faith, nevertheless, this doctrine argues from articles of faith to other truths.

Reply to Objection 2: This doctrine especially draws on arguments from authority, inasmuch as its principles are obtained by revelation: thus we ought to acknowledge the authority of those to whom the revelation has been made. Nor does this take away from the dignity of this doctrine, for although the argument from authority based on human reason is the weakest, yet the argument from authority based on divine revelation is the strongest. But sacred doctrine makes use even of human reason, to be sure, not to prove faith (for that would take away the merit of faith), but to make clear other things that are put forward in this doctrine. Therefore, since grace does not destroy nature but perfects it, natural reason should assist faith, just as the natural inclination of the will serves charity. This is why St. Paul speaks of 'bringing into captivity every understanding into the service of Christ.'⁴² And this is also why sacred doctrine uses even the authority of philosophers, insofar as they have been able to perceive the truth by natural reason – as when St. Paul quotes Aratus: 'As

38 Boethius (c. 480–c. 524), *In Topicis Ciceronis* I. PL 64, 1166.

39 St Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), *In Evangelium* II, 26. PL 76, 1197.

40 Titus 1: 9.

41 1 Corinthians 15: 12.

42 2 Corinthians 10: 5.

some of your poets have said, we are God's offspring.⁴³ Nevertheless, sacred doctrine makes use of these authorities as providing extraneous and probable arguments. It uses the authority of the canonical Scriptures as its own when it argues with necessity, and it also properly uses the authority of other doctors of the Church, but then it argues only with probability. For our faith rests upon the revelation made to the apostles and prophets who wrote the canonical books, and not on the revelations (if any such there are) made to other doctors. Hence Augustine says: "Only those books of Scripture which are called canonical have I learned to hold in such honor as to believe their authors have not erred in any way in writing them. But other authors I so read as not to deem everything in their works to be true merely on account of their having so thought and written, no matter how saintly and learned they were."⁴⁴

Article 9. Whether sacred doctrine should use metaphorical or figurative language?

Objection 1: It seems that sacred doctrine should not use metaphors. For that which is proper to the lowest discipline seems not to befit this doctrine, which holds the highest place of all, as I have already said. But to proceed by the aid of various similitudes and figures is proper to poetry, the lowest of all the disciplines. Therefore it is not fitting that this doctrine should make use of such similitudes.

Objection 2: Further, this doctrine seems to be intended to make truth clear. Hence a reward is held out to those who do so: "Those who explain me shall have everlasting life."⁴⁵ But by such similitudes truth is obscured. Therefore, it does not befit this science to teach divine things by likening them to corporeal things.

Objection 3: Further, the higher creatures are, the nearer they approach to the divine likeness. If therefore any creature is to be taken to represent God, this representation ought chiefly to be taken from the higher creatures, and not from the lower; yet this is often found in Scriptures.

On the contrary, Hosea writes, "I have multiplied visions, and I have used similitudes by the ministry of the prophets."⁴⁶ But to teach something by means of similitudes is to use metaphors. Therefore, sacred doctrine may use metaphors.

I answer that, Sacred Scripture fittingly teaches divine and spiritual truths by means of comparisons with material things. For God provides for everything according to the capacity of its nature. Now it is natural to man to attain to intellectual truths through sensible objects, because all our knowledge originates from the senses. Hence in Sacred Scripture, spiritual truths are fittingly taught under the likeness of material things. This is what Dionysius says: "The divine rays cannot enlighten us except wrapped up in many sacred veils."⁴⁷ Again, sacred Scripture is intended for all of us in common; as we read in *Romans*: "I am a debtor both to the learned and the ignorant."⁴⁸ So, Sacred Scripture fittingly teaches spiritual truths by means

43 Acts 17: 28. Aratus was a celebrated Hellenistic poet, who lived in the late fourth and early third centuries B.C., and was famous for his poem *Phaenomena*.

44 *Epistola* 82, 1. PL 33, 277.

45 Ecclesiastes 24: 31.

46 Hosea 12: 10.

47 *De caelesti hierarchia* I, 2. PG 3, 121.

48 Romans 1: 14.

of the imagery of corporeal things, so that even uneducated persons (who are unable to grasp intellectual truths in their own terms) may be able to understand them.

Reply to Objection 1: Poetry makes use of metaphors to produce a representation, for it is natural to man to be pleased with representations. But sacred doctrine makes use of metaphors because they are both necessary and useful, as I have just explained.

Reply to Objection 2: The ray of divine revelation is not extinguished by the sensible imagery by which it is veiled, as Dionysius says, and its truth remains, so that it does not allow the minds of those to whom the revelation has been made, to rest in the images, but raises them to the cognition truths; and through those to whom the revelation has been made others also may receive instruction in these matters. Hence those things that are taught metaphorically in one part of Scripture, in other parts are taught more explicitly. Indeed, the very hiding of truth in imagery is useful as a challenge for inquisitive minds and as a defense against the ridicule of the impious, in accordance with the words "Do not give what is holy to dogs."⁴⁹

Reply to Objection 3: As Dionysius says, Sacred Scripture more fittingly teaches divine truths using the imagery of less noble than of nobler bodies, for three reasons.⁵⁰ In the first place, this provides better safeguards against error for the human mind. For it is clear that these things cannot apply literally to God, which might be open to doubt had they been expressed by using the imagery of nobler bodies, especially for those who could think of nothing nobler than bodies. In the second place, this way of talking is more befitting the knowledge that we have of God in this life. For it is clearer to us what He is not than what He is. Therefore, the similitudes drawn from things farthest away from God make us better appreciate how far God is above whatsoever we may say or think of Him. In the third place, divine matters are in this way better shrouded from the unworthy.

Article 10. Whether in Sacred Scripture a passage may have several senses?

Objection 1: It seems that in Sacred Scripture a passage cannot have several senses, namely, the historical or literal, allegorical, tropological or moral, and anagogical. For several different senses in one text produce confusion and deception and destroy all force of argument. Hence no argument, but only fallacies, can be drawn from propositions having several senses. But Sacred Scripture should effectively state the truth without any fallacy. Therefore the same passage in it should not have several senses.

Objection 2: Furthermore, Augustine says "we can divide the Scripture which we call the Old Testament into history, etiology, analogy, and allegory."⁵¹ Now these four seem altogether different from the four divisions mentioned in the first objection. Therefore it does not seem fitting to explain the same passage of Sacred Scripture according to the four different senses mentioned above.

Objection 3: Furthermore, besides these senses, there is the parabolic sense, not included among the senses just listed.

49 Matthew 7: 6.

50 *De caelesti hierarchia* II, 2. PG 3, 136.

51 *De utilitate credendi* 3. PL 42, 68.

On the contrary, Gregory says that “sacred Scripture transcends all other sciences by its very style of expression, in that one and the same discourse, while narrating an event, also reveals a mystery.”⁵²

I answer that, The author of Sacred Scripture is God, in whose power it is to signify His meaning, not by words only (as man also can do), but also by things themselves. So, whereas in every other science things are signified by words, this science has the distinctive property that the things signified by the words in it also have a signification. Therefore that first signification whereby words signify things belongs to the first sense, the historical or literal. That signification whereby things signified by words also have a signification is called the spiritual sense, which is based on the literal, and presupposes it. Now this spiritual sense has a threefold division. For, as the Apostle says, “The Old Law is a figure of the New.”⁵³ And, as Dionysius says, the New Law is itself “a figure of the glory to come.”⁵⁴ Again, in the New Law, what our Head (Christ) has done is a sign of what we ought to do. Therefore, according to the allegorical sense, the things of the Old Law signify the things of the New Law. According to the moral sense, the things done by Christ or by those who prefigure Christ are the signs of what we ought to do. But according to the anagogical sense they signify what relates to eternal glory. However, since the literal sense is that which the author intends, and since the author of Sacred Scripture is God (who comprehends all at once by His understanding), it is not unfitting, as Augustine remarks, that even the literal sense of the same passage of Scripture conveys several meanings.⁵⁵

Reply to Objection 1: The multiplicity of these senses does not produce equivocation or any other kind of multiplicity of meanings, given that these senses are not multiplied because one word signifies several things, but because the things signified by the words can themselves be the signs of other things. Thus no confusion results in Sacred Scripture, for all the senses are founded on one – the literal sense. An argument can be drawn only from this sense, and not, as Augustine remarks in his letter to Vincent the Donatist, from things said by allegory.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, nothing of Holy Scripture perishes on account of this, since nothing necessary for faith is contained under the spiritual sense that is not elsewhere put forward by the Scripture in its literal sense.

Reply to Objection 2: These three – history, etiology, analogy – are grouped under the literal sense. For as Augustine explains in the same place, we have history whenever something is simply related; we have etiology when its cause is assigned, as when Our Lord gave the reason why Moses allowed the putting away of wives – namely, on account of the hardness of men’s hearts; and we have analogy whenever the truth of one text of Scripture is shown not to contradict the truth of another. Of the four senses listed in the objection, allegory alone stands for the three spiritual senses. Thus Hugh of St. Victor included the anagogical sense under the allegorical, and he enumerated just three senses – the historical, the allegorical, and the tropological.⁵⁷

52 *Moralia* XX, 1. PL 76, 135.

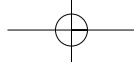
53 Hebrews 7: 19.

54 *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* V, 2. PG 3, 501.

55 *Confessiones* XII, 31. PL 32, 844.

56 *Epistola* 93, 8. PL 33, 334.

57 Hugh of St Victor (d. 1142 AD), *De sacramentis* I, prolog. 4. PL 176, 184.



Reply to Objection 3: The parabolical sense is contained under the literal, for words signify things strictly or figuratively. The literal sense is not the figure of speech itself, but what it stands for. When Scripture speaks of God's arm, the literal sense is not that God has such a physical limb, but only what is signified by such a limb, namely operative power. Hence it is plain that nothing false can ever underlie the literal sense of Sacred Scripture.

