

## PROLOGUE

Since, according to the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 (“As unto little ones in Christ, I gave you milk to drink, not meat”), a doctor of Catholic truth not only ought to teach those who are advanced, but is also charged with instructing beginners, our intention in the present work is to propound the things belonging to the Christian religion in a way consonant with the instruction of beginners. For we have noticed that newcomers to this study are commonly hampered by the writings of different authors—partly because of the proliferation of superfluous questions, articles, and arguments; partly because the things they need to know are taught not according to the order of learning, but instead as is required for the exposition of texts or as opportunities for disputing certain questions present themselves; and partly because frequent repetition in these same writings generates both antipathy and confusion in the minds of the listeners. In an effort to avoid these and other such problems, we will try, with trust in God’s help, to set forth what belongs to sacred doctrine as briefly and clearly as the subject matter allows.

## QUESTION 1

### The Nature and Extent of Sacred Doctrine

In order to situate our goal within certain set limits, we must first inquire into what sacred doctrine is and how far it extends.

On this matter there are ten questions to be asked: (1) Is this doctrine necessary? (2) Is it a science? (3) Is it a single science or more than one science? (4) Is it a speculative science or a practical science? (5) How does it compare to the other sciences? (6) Does it constitute wisdom? (7) What is its subject? (8) Does it make use of arguments? (9) Should it use metaphorical or symbolic locutions? (10) Should the Sacred Scripture relevant to this doctrine be expounded according to multiple senses?

### Article 1

#### Is it necessary to have a doctrine over and beyond the philosophical disciplines?

It seems unnecessary to have any doctrine over and beyond the philosophical disciplines:

**Objection 1:** According to Sirach 3:22 (“Seek not the things that are too high for you”), man should not strive for things that lie beyond reason. But the things that fall under reason are adequately treated in the philosophical disciplines. Therefore, it seems superfluous to have a doctrine over and beyond the philosophical disciplines.

**Objection 2:** There cannot be a doctrine that is not about some being, since nothing is known except the true, which is convertible with *being*. But all beings are treated in the philosophical disciplines, even God—this is why one part of philosophy is called theology or divine science, as is clear from the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 6. Therefore, it was unnecessary to have another doctrine over and beyond the philosophical disciplines.

**But contrary to this:** 2 Timothy 3:16 says: “All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice.” But divinely inspired Scripture is not pertinent to the philosophical disciplines, which have been devised according to human reason. Therefore, it is advantageous that, over and beyond the philosophical disciplines, there should be another science that is divinely inspired.

**I respond:** It was necessary for human salvation that, over and beyond the philosophical

disciplines devised by human reason, there should be a doctrine conformable with divine revelation.

For, first of all, according to Isaiah 64:4 (“The eye has not seen, O God, apart from You, what things You have prepared for them that wait for You”), man is ordered toward God as an end who exceeds the comprehension of reason. But the end must first be known to men, since they have to order their intentions and actions toward the end. Hence, it was necessary for man’s salvation that certain things exceeding human reason should be made known to him through divine revelation.

In addition, it was necessary for man to be instructed by divine revelation even with respect to those things about God that can be discovered by human reason. For the truth about God that is discovered by reason would come to man only from a few, and after a long time, and mixed in with many errors. But the whole of man’s salvation, which lies in God, depends on the cognition of this truth. Therefore, in order that salvation should come to men more suitably and more surely, it was necessary for them to be instructed in divine things through divine revelation.

Therefore, over and beyond the philosophical disciplines discovered by human reason, it was necessary that a sacred doctrine be had through revelation.

**Reply to objection 1:** Even if man should not inquire through human reason into things that are too high for human cognition, such things should nonetheless be accepted through faith when they are revealed by God. This is why in the same place it is added, “For many things are shown to you above the understanding of men.” Sacred doctrine consists in things of this sort.

**Reply to objection 2:** Diverse conceptual characteristics (*ratio cognoscibilis*) make for diverse sciences. For instance, the astronomer and the natural philosopher demonstrate the same conclusion, viz., that the earth is round. But the astronomer does this through a mathematical middle term—i.e., a middle term abstracted from matter—whereas the natural philosopher does it through a middle term considered materially. Hence, nothing prevents it from being the case that the same things that the philosophical disciplines treat insofar as they are knowable by the light of natural reason should be treated by another science insofar as they are known by the light of divine revelation. Hence, the theology associated with sacred doctrine differs in kind from the theology that is posited as a part of philosophy.

## Article 2

### Is sacred doctrine a science?

It seems that sacred doctrine is not a science:

**Objection 1:** Every science proceeds from first principles that are known *per se*. But sacred doctrine proceeds from the articles of the faith, which are not known *per se*, since they are not conceded by everyone; for as 2 Thessalonians 3:2 puts it, “Not everyone has faith.” Therefore sacred doctrine is not a science.

**Objection 2:** A science is not about singular things. But sacred doctrine treats of singular things—e.g., the deeds of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. Therefore, sacred doctrine is not a science.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Trinitate* 15 Augustine says: “Only this science has the means by which saving faith is begotten, nourished, defended, and strengthened.” But this pertains to no science except sacred doctrine. Therefore, sacred doctrine is a science.

**I respond:** Sacred doctrine is a science. But notice that there are two kinds of science. Some sciences, e.g., arithmetic, geometry, etc., proceed from first principles known by the natural light of the intellect. By contrast, other sciences proceed from first principles known by the light of a higher science.

For instance, the science of perspective proceeds from first principles made known through geometry, and the science of music proceeds from first principles made known through arithmetic.

It is in this second way that sacred doctrine is a science. For it proceeds from first principles known by the light of a higher science, viz., the science had by God and the blessed in heaven. So just as music takes on faith the principles handed down to it by arithmetic, so too sacred doctrine takes on faith the principles revealed to it by God.

**Reply to objection 1:** The first principles of a science are either known *per se* or else traced back to the knowledge that belongs to a higher science. As was just explained, the first principles of sacred doctrine are of the latter type.

**Reply to objection 2:** Sacred doctrine treats singular things not because it deals with them principally, but because they are introduced as examples for living, as in the moral sciences, and also because they make clear the authority of those men through whom the divine revelation that grounds Sacred Scripture and sacred doctrine has come down to us.

### Article 3

#### Is sacred doctrine a single science?

It seems that sacred doctrine is not a single science:

**Objection 1:** According to the Philosopher in *Posterior Analytics* 1, a single science has just one type of subject. But creator and creature, with which sacred doctrine deals, are not contained under a single type of subject. Therefore, sacred doctrine is not a single science.

**Objection 2:** Sacred doctrine deals with angels, corporeal creatures, and human morals. But these things pertain to different philosophical sciences. Therefore, sacred doctrine is not a single science.

**But contrary to this:** Sacred Scripture speaks of it as a single science. For Wisdom 10:10 says, “She gave him the knowledge (*scientia*) of holy things.”

**I respond:** Sacred doctrine is a single science. For the unity of a power or a habit must be thought of as following from its object—not from its object taken materially, but rather from some formal characteristic of its object. For instance, a man, a donkey, and a rock agree in the formal characteristic of being colored, which constitutes the object of vision.

Since, as was explained above (a.1), sacred doctrine considers certain things insofar as they have been divinely revealed, everything that can be divinely revealed shares in the one formal characteristic of the object of this science. And so all such things are included under sacred doctrine as a single science.

**Reply to objection 1:** Sacred doctrine does not deal with God and creatures on an equal basis. Rather, it deals with God principally and with creatures insofar as they are related to God as their origin or their end. Hence, the unity of the science is not obstructed.

**Reply to objection 2:** Nothing prevents lower powers or habits from being differentiated by subject matters that all fall under a single higher power or habit, since the higher power or habit treats its object under a more general formal characteristic. For instance, the object of the common sensory power is the sensible, which includes both the visible and the audible. Hence, even though the common sensory power is a single power, it extends to all the objects of the five senses.

In the same way, things that are treated in diverse philosophical sciences can be dealt with by sacred doctrine—even while it remains a single science—under a single characteristic, viz., the characteristic of being divinely revealed. In this sense, sacred doctrine is, as it were, a sort of image of God’s own knowledge (*scientia*), which is a unified and simple knowledge of all things.

#### Article 4

##### Is sacred doctrine a practical science?

It seems that sacred doctrine is a practical science:

**Objection 1:** According to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics 2*, the end of a practical science is operation. But according to James 1:22 (“Be you doers of the word, and not hearers only”), sacred doctrine is ordered to operation. Therefore, sacred doctrine is a practical science.

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

**But contrary to this:** Every practical science is about things that can be done by man. For instance, moral science is about the acts of men, and the science of building is about buildings. But sacred doctrine is principally about God, and it is men who are rather the works of God. Therefore, sacred doctrine is not a practical science but instead a speculative science.

**I respond:** As was explained above (a. 3), sacred doctrine, while remaining a single science, extends to things that pertain to different philosophical sciences, and this because of the formal characteristic that it considers in the different things, viz., their being knowable by the divine light. Hence, even though some of the philosophical sciences are speculative and others are practical, sacred doctrine includes both types within itself—just as it is by the same knowledge that God knows both Himself and the things that He does.

Still, sacred doctrine is more speculative than practical, since it deals more principally with divine things than with human acts. For it deals with human acts insofar as it is through those acts that man is ordered toward that perfect knowledge of God in which eternal happiness consists.

**Reply to Objection 1 and Objection 2:** The reply to the objections is clear from what has been said.

#### Article 5

##### Is sacred doctrine more noble than the other sciences?

It seems that sacred doctrine is not more noble than the other sciences:

**Objection 1:** Certitude is relevant to a science’s nobility. But the other sciences, whose first principles cannot be doubted, seem to be more certain than sacred doctrine, whose first principles—viz., the articles of the faith—are open to doubt. Therefore, the other sciences seem to be more noble than sacred doctrine.

**Objection 2:** A lower science borrows from a higher science; for instance, music borrows from arithmetic. But sacred doctrine borrows something from the philosophical sciences. For in the letter *Ad Magnam Oratorem Urbis Romae* Jerome says that the ancient doctors “sprinkled their books with the teachings and opinions of the philosophers to such an extent that you do not know what to admire more in them, their worldly learning or their knowledge of the Scriptures.” Therefore, sacred doctrine is inferior to the other sciences.

**But contrary to this:** In Proverbs 9:3 (“Wisdom has sent her maids to issue an invitation to the tower”) the other sciences are called the handmaidens of sacred doctrine.

**I respond:** Since the science of sacred doctrine is in some respects speculative and in other

respects practical, it transcends all the other sciences, both speculative and practical.

Among the speculative sciences, one is more noble than another both because of its certitude and because of the proper nobility of its subject matter. The science of sacred doctrine exceeds the other speculative sciences in both regards. It exceeds them in certitude, because the other sciences have their certitude from the natural light of human reason, which is able to make mistakes, whereas sacred doctrine has its certitude from the light of God's knowledge, which cannot be deceived. And it exceeds them in the nobility of its subject matter, since this science is principally about things that transcend reason in their loftiness, whereas the other sciences consider only those things that fall under reason.

Among the practical sciences, on the other hand, the more noble is that which is ordered toward a more ultimate end. For instance, the science of government is more noble than military science because the good of the army is ordered to the good of the state. But the end of sacred doctrine as a practical science is eternal happiness, and this is the ultimate end to which all the other ends of the practical sciences are ordered.

Hence, it is clear that sacred doctrine is in every way more noble than the other sciences.

**Reply to objection 1:** Nothing prevents it from being the case that what is more certain by nature is less certain to us, and this because of the weakness of our intellect, which, according to *Metaphysics 2*, is related to the things that are most manifest by nature as the eye of an owl is related to the light of the sun. So the doubt that occurs in some with regard to the articles of the faith is due not to a lack of certitude on the part of the things themselves, but rather to the weakness of the human intellect. And yet, according to *On the Parts of Animals 11*, the least cognition that can be had of the highest things is more desirable than the most firm cognition that is had of the lowest things.

**Reply to objection 2:** Sacred doctrine can borrow something from the philosophical disciplines not because it needs these disciplines out of necessity, but in order to make clearer the matters that are dealt with in this science. For sacred doctrine takes its first principles not from the other sciences, but directly from God through revelation. And so it does not borrow from the other sciences as from its superiors, but rather uses them as its inferiors and handmaidens, in the way that architectonic sciences make use of the sciences that minister to them—as, for instance, the science of government makes use of military science. Furthermore, the fact that sacred doctrine uses the other sciences in this way is due not to its own defectiveness or inadequacy, but rather to the defectiveness of our intellect, which is more easily led toward things that lie beyond reason (the subject matter of sacred doctrine) by things that are known through natural reason (from which the other sciences take their starting points).

## Article 6

### Does sacred doctrine constitute wisdom?

It seems that sacred doctrine does not constitute wisdom:

**Objection 1:** No doctrine that takes its first principles from elsewhere is worthy of the name 'wisdom'; for according to *Metaphysics 1*, "it belongs to wisdom to order and not to be ordered." But as is clear from what was said above (a. 2), sacred doctrine takes its first principles from elsewhere. Therefore, this doctrine does not constitute wisdom.

**Objection 2:** It is the task of wisdom to prove the first principles of the other sciences; this is why wisdom is said to be like the head of the sciences, as is clear from *Ethics 6*. But sacred doctrine does not prove the first principles of the other sciences. Therefore, it does not constitute wisdom.

**Objection 3:** Sacred doctrine is acquired through study. But wisdom is had by being infused; this

is why it is numbered among the gifts of the Holy Spirit, as is clear from Isaiah 11:2. Therefore, sacred doctrine does not constitute wisdom.

**But contrary to this:** Deuteronomy 4:6, at the beginning of the law, says, “This is our wisdom and understanding in the sight of the nations.”

**I respond:** Among all human wisdoms, sacred doctrine constitutes wisdom in the highest sense—not just wisdom in some genus, but wisdom absolutely speaking. For since it is the function of the wise man to order and to judge, and since judgment is made about lower things in light of a higher cause, the wise man with respect to any given genus is the one who carefully considers the highest cause in that genus. For instance, in the genus of building, the craftsman who plans the form of a house is called the architect and is said to be wise in relation to the lower craftsmen who cut the wood or prepare the stones; hence, 1 Corinthians 3:10 says, “As a wise architect I have laid the foundation.” Again, in the genus of the whole of human life, the prudent man is called wise insofar as he orders human acts to their due end; hence, Proverbs 10:23 says, “Wisdom is prudence to a man.” Therefore, the one who considers the absolutely highest cause of the entire universe, viz., God, is called wise in the highest sense. Hence, wisdom is said to be “the cognition of divine things,” as is clear from Augustine in *De Trinitate* 12.

Now it is sacred doctrine that most properly makes determinations about God insofar as He is the highest cause. For it does so not only with respect to that which is knowable through creatures—this the philosophers have discovered, as it says in Romans 1:9 (“That which is known of God is manifest to them”)—but also with respect to that which He alone knows about Himself and which has been communicated to others by revelation. Hence, sacred doctrine is called wisdom in the highest sense.

**Reply to objection 1:** Sacred doctrine takes its first principles not from any human science but from God’s knowledge, by which all of our cognition is ordered as by the highest wisdom.

**Reply to objection 2:** The first principles of other sciences are either known *per se*, in which case they cannot be proved, or they are proved by natural arguments in some other science. In contrast, the cognition proper to sacred doctrine comes through revelation and not through natural reason. And so the function of sacred doctrine is not to prove the first principles of the other sciences, but only to pass judgment on those principles. That is, anything in the other sciences that is found to be contrary to the truth of sacred doctrine is condemned as false. Hence, 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 says, “The weapons of our warfare ..... destroy counsels and every height that exalts itself against the knowledge of God.”

**Reply to objection 3:** Since the function of wisdom is judgment, ‘wisdom’ is understood in two ways, corresponding to the two ways of judging.

One way in which someone can judge is by *inclination*. For instance, someone with a virtuous habit makes correct judgments about the things to be done in accord with that virtue insofar as he is inclined toward those things. This is why *Ethics* 10 says that the virtuous person is the measure and rule of human acts.

The other way in which someone can judge is by *cognition*. For instance, one who is versed in moral science could make judgments about the acts of a given virtue even if he did not have that virtue.

The first way of judging belongs to the wisdom that is posited as a gift of the Holy Spirit—this according to 1 Corinthians 2:15 (“The spiritual man judges all things”) and according to Dionysius in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 2 (“Hierotheus became learned not only by studying but by experiencing divine things”). The second way of judging, on the other hand, is pertinent to sacred doctrine insofar as it is had through study, even though its first principles are had from revelation.

## Article 7

### Is God the subject of the science of sacred doctrine?

It seems that God is not the subject of the science of sacred doctrine:

**Objection 1:** According to the Philosopher in *Posterior Analytics* 1, every science must presuppose a real definition (*quid est*) of its subject. But the science of sacred doctrine does not presuppose a real definition of God; for Damascene says, “In the case of God, it is impossible to say what He is.” Therefore, God is not the subject of sacred doctrine.

**Objection 2:** Everything that is determined by a science is included in the subject of that science. But in Sacred Scripture determinations are made about many things other than God, e.g., about creatures and human morals. Therefore, God is not the subject of sacred doctrine.

**But contrary to this:** The subject of a science is what that science talks about. But in the science of sacred doctrine it is God who is talked about; for sacred doctrine is called theology, i.e., discourse about God. Therefore, God is the subject of sacred doctrine.

**I respond:** God is the subject of the science of sacred doctrine. For the subject of a science is related to that science in the way that the object of a power or habit is related to that power or habit. But that which is properly designated as the object of a power or habit is such that everything is related to the power or habit under the formal characteristic (*ratio*) of that object. For instance, a man and a rock are related to sight insofar as they are colored, and so *being colored* is the object of sight.

In sacred doctrine everything is treated under the formal characteristic *God*, either because the things in question are God Himself or because they are ordered to God as their origin and their end. Hence, it follows that God is indeed the subject of this science.

This is also clear from the fact that the first principles of this science—viz., the articles of the faith—are about God. But the subject of the first principles of a science is the same as the subject of the science as a whole, since the entire science is contained virtually in its first principles.

However, some authors, focusing on the things that are dealt with in the science of sacred doctrine and not on the formal characteristic under which they are considered, have assigned other subjects to this science—either things and signs, or the works of redemption, or the whole of Christ, both head and members. And, to be sure, all these things are dealt with in the science of sacred doctrine, but only insofar as they are ordered to God.

**Reply to objection 1:** Even though we cannot know the real definition (*quid est*) of God, nonetheless, in the science of sacred doctrine we use His effects, whether effects of nature or effects of grace, instead of a definition in regard to the things considered in this doctrine—just as in the other philosophical sciences, too, something is demonstrated about a cause through its effect, where the effect takes the place of a definition of the cause.

**Reply to objection 2:** All the other things that are determined in sacred doctrine are included under God—not as parts or species or accidents of God, but as things ordered to Him in some way.

## Article 8

### Does sacred doctrine make use of arguments?

It seems that sacred doctrine does not make use of arguments:

**Objection 1:** In *De Fide Catholica* Ambrose says, “Do away with arguments when seeking faith.” But in sacred doctrine it is principally faith that is sought; hence, John 20:31 says, “These things have been written in order that you might believe.” Therefore, sacred doctrine does not make use of arguments.

**Objection 2:** If sacred doctrine made use of arguments, it would argue either from authority or from reason. If it argued from authority, this would seem to conflict with its nobility; for, according to Boethius, proofs derived from authority are the weakest. Likewise, if it argued from reason, this would conflict with its purpose; for according to Gregory in his homily, “Faith is without merit when human reason provides its own test.” Therefore, sacred doctrine does not make use of arguments.

**But contrary to this:** Titus 1:9 says this about a bishop: “He must embrace that faithful word which is according to doctrine, that he may be able to exhort in sound doctrine and to convince the gainsayers.”

**I respond:** The other sciences do not argue in order to prove their first principles, but rather argue from those first principles to other things within the sciences themselves. So, too, sacred doctrine does not argue in order to prove its first principles, which are the articles of the faith, but instead proceeds on the basis of those principles in order to prove something else. For instance, in 1 Corinthians 15:12ff. the Apostle argues from the resurrection of Christ in order to prove the general resurrection.

Notice, however, that among the philosophical sciences the lower sciences neither prove their own first principles nor dispute with anyone who denies those principles; instead, they leave this to a higher science. In contrast, the highest science among them, viz., metaphysics, does dispute with someone who denies its first principles, as long as that adversary concedes something or other. But if he concedes nothing, it is impossible to dispute with him—though it is still possible to refute his arguments.

Therefore, since sacred doctrine has no science higher than itself, it disputes with someone who denies its first principles—and this by employing arguments—as long as that adversary concedes some of the things that are had by divine revelation. For example, with heretics we dispute by appealing to passages from Sacred Scripture, and against those who deny one article of the faith we argue by appealing to another article. However, if our adversary believes nothing that has been divinely revealed, then there is no further way to prove the articles of the faith by arguments—though there is room for answering his objections to the faith if he offers any. For since the faith is based on infallible truth, and since it is impossible to demonstrate the contrary of a truth, it is obvious that proofs brought against the faith do not constitute demonstrations, but are instead answerable arguments.

**Reply to objection 1:** As noted above, even though the arguments of human reason play no role in proving things that belong to the faith, sacred doctrine nonetheless does argue from the articles of the faith to other things.

**Reply to objection 2:** It is especially appropriate for sacred doctrine to argue from authority. For the first principles of sacred doctrine are had by revelation, and so we must trust the authority of those to whom this revelation has been made. Nor does this detract from the nobility of sacred doctrine. For even though an argument from an authority founded on human reason is the weakest of arguments, an argument from an authority founded on divine revelation is the most efficacious of arguments.

Nonetheless, sacred doctrine uses human reason as well—not, to be sure, in order to prove the faith, since this would destroy the meritoriousness of faith, but rather to make clear certain other things that are dealt with in this doctrine. For since grace perfects nature and does not destroy it, natural reason must serve the faith, just as the natural inclination of the will likewise serves charity. This is why in 2 Corinthians 10:5 the Apostle says, “..... bringing into captivity every understanding unto the obedience of Christ.” This is also why sacred doctrine uses citations from the philosophers in those instances in which the philosophers have been able to discern the truth through natural reason. For instance, in Acts



17:28 Paul cites the saying of Aratos in these words: “As one of your own poets said: ‘For we are also His offspring’.”

Still, even though sacred doctrine uses citations of the sort in question as extraneous and probable arguments, it properly uses citations from the canonical Scriptures when arguing from necessity. For our faith is based on the revelation made to the Apostles and Prophets who wrote the canonical books and not on any revelation that might have been made to other doctors. Thus, in a letter to Jerome, Augustine says, “It is only to those books of the Scriptures called canonical that I have learned to give the honor of believing with utter confidence that none of their authors has erred in anything. In contrast, I read other authors in such a way that no matter how distinguished they might be in holiness and learning, I do not think something true simply because they have thought it or written it.”

## Article 9

### Should Sacred Scripture make use of metaphors?

It seems that Sacred Scripture should not make use of metaphors:

**Objection 1:** That which is proper to the lowest doctrine does not seem to be suitable for the science of sacred doctrine, which, as already noted, holds the highest place among the other sciences. But to proceed by means of various likenesses and representations is proper to poetics, which is the lowest among all doctrines. Therefore, using likenesses of this sort is not appropriate for the science of sacred doctrine.

**Objection 2:** Sacred doctrine seems to be ordered to the manifestation of truth; thus it is that according to Ecclesiasticus 24:31 (“They that explain me shall have life everlasting”), a reward is promised to those who make the truth manifest. But the truth is obscured by likenesses of the sort in question. Therefore, it is inappropriate for sacred doctrine to teach divine things by means of likenesses drawn from corporeal things.

**Objection 3:** Creatures are more sublime to the extent that they are more similar to God. So if any creatures are to be likened to God, the similes should be drawn especially from the more sublime creatures and not from the lowliest. Yet this latter sort of simile is often found in Sacred Scripture.

**But contrary to this:** Osee 12:10 says, “I have multiplied visions, and I have used likenesses by the ministry of the prophets.” But to teach something by means of a likeness is metaphorical. Therefore, making use of metaphors pertains to sacred doctrine.

**I respond:** It is appropriate for Sacred Scripture to teach about divine and spiritual things by means of likenesses drawn from corporeal things.

For God provides for all things in a way that is suitable to their nature. But it is natural for man to approach intelligible things through sensible things, since all our cognition takes its origin from the senses. Hence, it is appropriate for Sacred Scripture to teach us spiritual things by way of metaphors drawn from corporeal things. Dionysius makes this point in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 1: “It is impossible for the divine ray to illumine us unless it is enshrouded by a variety of sacred veils.”

In addition, since Sacred Scripture is proposed generally to everyone (as Romans 1:14 puts it, “To the wise and to the unwise I am a debtor”), it is appropriate for spiritual things to be proposed by means of likenesses drawn from corporeal things, in order that Scripture might be grasped even by those who are so untutored as to be incapable of grasping what is intelligible in itself.

**Reply to objection 1:** A poet uses metaphors for the sake of representation itself, since representation is naturally delightful to man. But, as noted above, sacred doctrine uses metaphors out of

necessity and because of their usefulness.

**Reply to objection 2:** As Dionysius says, the light of divine revelation is not destroyed by the sensible figures in which it is veiled. Rather, it remains in its truth, so that it does not allow the minds to which the revelation is made to persist in the likenesses, but instead raises them to the cognition of intelligible things—and through these minds to which the revelation has been made others are also instructed about those intelligible things. This is why things that in one passage of Scripture are related by means of metaphors are expounded more explicitly in other passages. Indeed, the very obscurity of the figures is useful for exercising more diligent minds, and it is also useful for countering the ridicule of non-believers of which Matthew 7:6 speaks (“Give not that which is holy to dogs”).

**Reply to objection 3:** As Dionysius teaches in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 2, it is more fitting for divine things to be transmitted in the Scriptures by figures of speech drawn from lower bodies than by figures of speech drawn from more noble bodies—and this for three reasons.

First, in this way the mind is rendered more free from error. For it is obvious that the figures in question are not being predicated properly of divine things, whereas there could be some doubt about this if divine things were described by figures drawn from the more noble bodies—especially in the eyes of those who did not know how to conceive of anything more noble than bodies.

Second, this mode of expression is more appropriate for the cognition that we have of God in this life. For as far as God is concerned, what He is not is clearer to us than what He is. And so likenesses drawn from things that are further removed from God produce in us the more accurate impression that God is beyond what we say or think about Him.

Third, this mode of expression is better at hiding divine things from those who are unworthy of them.

## Article 10

### Does Sacred Scripture have multiple senses underlying a single passage?

It seems that Sacred Scripture does not have more than one sense underlying a single passage, viz., the *historical* or *literal* sense, the *allegorical* sense, the *tropological* or *moral* sense, and the *anagogical* sense.

**Objection 1:** A multiplicity of senses for a single passage of Scripture produces confusion and deception, and it undermines the firmness of the arguments; thus, an argument that proceeds from propositions with many senses is not sound, but instead has one or another fallacy ascribed to it. But Sacred Scripture ought to be effective at exhibiting the truth without any fallacy at all. Therefore, in Sacred Scripture there should not be multiple senses underlying a single passage.

**Objection 2:** In *De Utilitate Credendi* Augustine says, “The Scripture that is called the Old Testament is fourfold, including history, aetiology, analogy, and allegory.” But these four senses seem altogether different from the four enumerated above. Therefore, it does not seem fitting for the same passage of Sacred Scripture to be expounded according to the four senses enumerated above.

**Objection 3:** In addition to the senses enumerated above there is the parabolic sense, which is not included among those senses.

**But contrary to this:** In *Moralia* 20 Gregory says, “By its very manner of speech Sacred Scripture transcends all the sciences. For in one and the same passage it makes known a mystery even as it narrates a deed.”

**I respond:** The author of Sacred Scripture is God, who has it in His power to use not only words

for signifying, but even the very things themselves. And so even though words are used to signify in all the sciences, it is peculiar to the science of sacred doctrine that the things signified by its words likewise signify something themselves.

Thus, the first type of signification, by which words signify things, pertains to the first sense, which is the *historical* or *literal* sense. On the other hand, the type of signification by which the things signified by words in turn signify other things, is called the *spiritual* sense, which is built upon the literal sense and presupposes it.

Now this spiritual sense is divided into three. For as the Apostle says at Hebrews 7:19, the Old Law is a figure of the New Law, and the New Law is, as Dionysius puts it in *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchia*, a figure of future glory; again, in the New Law those things that were done at the beginning are signs of the things that we ourselves ought to do. Thus, insofar as the things belonging to the Old Law signify things that belong to the New Law, there is the *allegorical* sense. Insofar as the things that were done in Christ (or in those Scriptures that signify Christ) are signs of things that we ourselves ought to do, there is the *moral* sense. And insofar as they signify things pertaining to eternal glory, there is the *anagogical* sense.

Moreover, since the literal sense is the sense intended by the author, and since the author of Sacred Scripture is God, who comprehends all things at once by His intellect, it follows that, as Augustine says in *Confessiones* 12, it is not inappropriate for a single Scriptural passage to have more than one sense even with respect to the literal sense.

**Reply to objection 1:** The multiplicity of these senses does not make for equivocation or any other type of ambivalence. For, as was just explained, these senses are multiplied not because a single word signifies many things, but because the very things signified by the words are capable of being signs of other things. Likewise, no confusion results in Sacred Scripture, since all the senses are built upon one sense, viz., the literal sense; and, as Augustine explains in *Contra Vicentium Donatistam*, it is from the literal sense alone that an argument can be drawn, and not from those things that are said allegorically. Yet nothing is thereby lost from Sacred Scripture, since everything necessary to the faith that is contained under a spiritual sense is such that Scripture teaches it explicitly through the literal sense in some other place.

**Reply to objection 2:** Three of the items in question—history, aetiology, and analogy—all pertain to one sense, viz., the literal sense. For, as Augustine himself explains, there is *history* when something is simply set forth; there is *aetiology* when a cause is assigned to something that has been said, as when Our Lord explained the reason why Moses had given them license to put their wives away, viz., because of the hardness of their hearts (Matthew 19:8); and there is *analogy* when the truth of one Scriptural passage is shown not to conflict with the truth of another passage.

Of the four things mentioned in the objection, *allegory* is the only one posited for the three spiritual senses—just as, in *Summa Sententiarum* 3 Hugh of St. Victor also includes the anagogical sense under the allegorical, positing just three senses, viz., the *historical*, the *allegorical*, and the *tropological*.

**Reply to objection 3:** The *parabolic* sense is included under the literal sense. For in a parable something is properly signified by the words and something is figuratively signified; and the literal sense is not the figure itself, but rather that which the figure is a figure of. For instance, when Scripture speaks of the arm of God, the literal sense is not that God has a bodily part of the sort in question; rather, the literal sense is that God has what is signified by this bodily part, viz., operative power. This makes clear how it is that nothing false can ever lie at the basis of the literal sense of Sacred Scripture.