

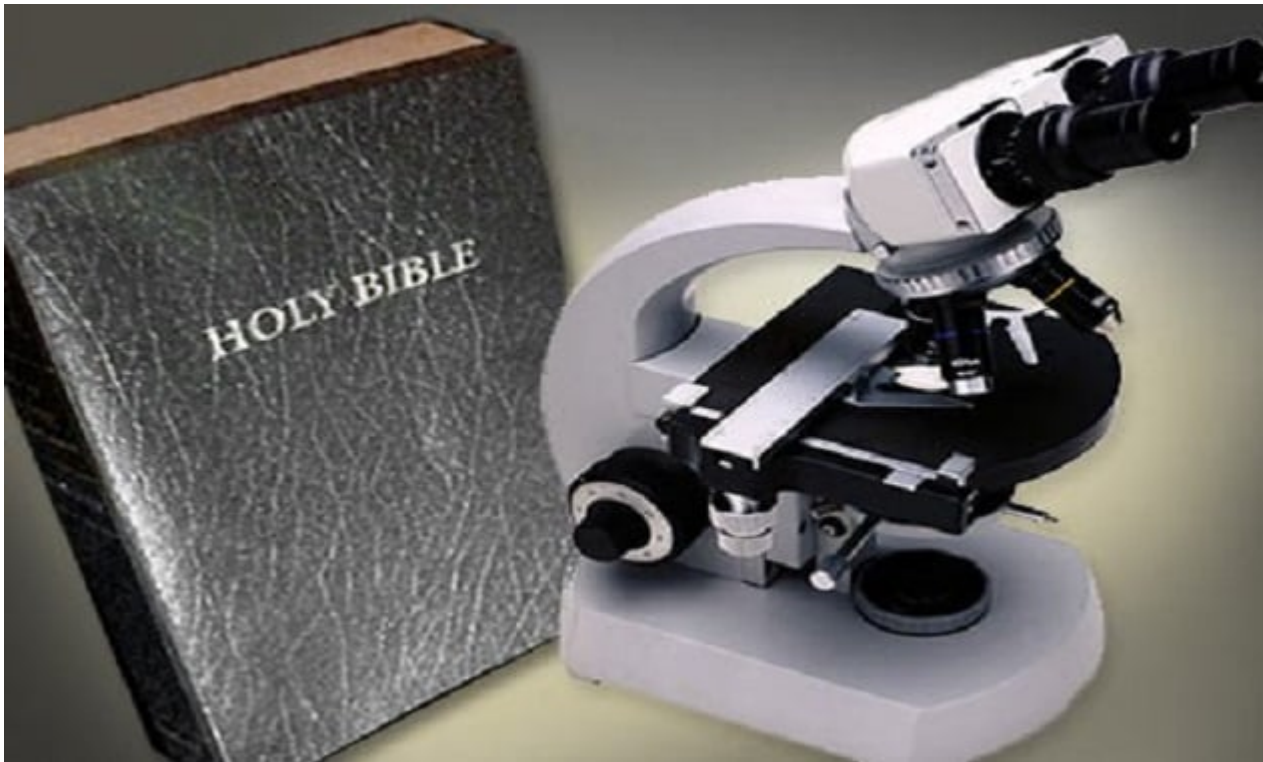
# **The Roots of the Problem of Disconnect between Christianity and the Scientific Community [2]**

## **(Archbishop Lazar Puhalo)**

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



It is here that we must defend some aspects of the Scholastic movement. Our criticism of it is limited to the theological and spiritual problems that it caused, not to its overall gift of a systematic way of thinking and exploring, nor of its opening up of the knowledge and method that could lead to authentic science — something that simply did not develop in the Byzantine East. After the 600s is it likely that there could have been little advance toward modern science and medicine in the East. The remaining centuries of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire were filled with an all consuming struggle for survival. The vital and energetic intellectual movement in the West resulted from the excitement of a rediscovery of the literature that had been preserved, but not used to the best advantage, in Byzantium. Every theological critique of Scholasticism, therefore, should acknowledge its gifts also. We are concerned in this work primarily with the later conflicts that the Scholastic mode of theologising would create between Christianity and modern science.



The translations which began to appear in Western Europe in this era were by no means limited to philosophical treatises, or even to the philosophical science of Aristotle. The works on chemistry of Jabir ibn Hayyan (+ca.785) appeared in Europe in the 12th and 13th centuries. Adelard of Bath translated Al-Khwarizmi's works on arithmetic and trigonometry (the Astronomical table) in the first quarter of the 1100s, and Robert of Chester, working in Segovia in 1145, translated the work on algebra by the same author. The 12th century scholar of Toledo, Gerard of Cremona, translated medical and chemistry texts by Thabit ibn Kwerra (+901), Rhazes (+925) and Hali Abbas (+994). Al-hazen's **Optical Thesaurus** was translated in the 12th century and Michael Scot translated Alpetragos' work on the Aristotelian concentric system of astronomy in 1217. Apollonios, Archimedes, Diocles and Hero of Alexandria all appeared in Western Europe in translation during the 1200s. Ptolemy's **Almagest** and the physics of Proclus and Simplicius were translated from the Greek by Gerard of Cremona, Robert Grosseteste and William of Moerbeke during the 13th century. Galen's treatises on medicine had begun to appear by the end of the 1100s. It seems worth mentioning, incidentally, that the Arabs had learned many of the most important aspects of mathematics not from the Greeks but from India, where several great Hindu scholars such as Ariavata in the early 500s, Brahmagupta in the 600s and Bashkhara in the 1100s, had mastered much which was necessary for the advancement of science. Because the resurgence of learning encompassed every aspect of intellectual activity, the new schemata of Latin philosophical theology took a form quite similar to the order espoused by some of the stoics, at least as expressed by Zeno (d.264 B.C.). He

defined philosophy in three categories: logic, ethics and physics. Scholastic theology seems to have embraced these three as part of its discipline, and this is because theology was, for them, a system of philosophy — at least a theology justified by philosophy; *fides quarens intellectum*.

Part of the genius of the Scholastics was, perhaps, their enthusiastic ability to embrace these three categories into their theological speculations. Whatever negative effects it had on Latin and Protestant theology, it contributed greatly to the development of systematized and disciplined thought and intellectual pursuits. One would think that the Scholastics were also much influenced by Aristotle's early concept of «natural theology» as a category of metaphysics[i] and perhaps troubled by his later concept of it as mythology. It must be remembered that the general scheme of theological study in the West was laid down long before the «awakening» and the era of the Scholastics. Augustine contributed its Platonic and Gnostic roots, while Boethius, who died in about 525 A.D., had already introduced Aristotle into Western thought.[ii] It was through Boethius that rational categories were applied to theological speculations. He introduced, from Aristotle, the three speculative facets of philosophy: natural, mathematical and theological. Both Augustine and Boethius had something to do with shaping theology into a philosophical pursuit, but during the Dark Ages, Boethius was eclipsed by the Augustinians and Aristotle was virtually lost to Latin thought during this intellectual hiatus. We are not concerned to trace the fine details of the development of Western theology and philosophy here, but we wish to mention that part of the problem in the Western philosophical concept of theology is that the theologians wanted to know and explain far more than can be properly explained. They ultimately wanted to visualize (even when they claimed otherwise) the inner workings of the Trinity[iii] and tried (some of them) to turn grace into an observable science with fixed laws of behaviour.[iv] The root of much of the confusion which would develop in Scholasticism, aside from a lack of awareness of the uncreated energies, lay in a faulty concept of what would later be referred to as epistemology.[v] All radical dualisms lead to falsehood, often to idolatry. The concept of representative perception which developed, created an idea that the things we experience or apprehend are not the things in themselves but representational mental images. Knowledge of God thus becomes a symbolic abstraction. Since the Scholastics thought of God as the «unmoved mover,» and, therefore, conceived of as being always «at rest.» such «motion» as the action of grace and the activity of His energy must refer to created, transient constructs, and not to a real presence of divine, uncreated energy. Thus God is not known personally but only in intellectual, rational images — in types and symbols. The epistemological dualism of the era left no ground for empirical or existential

knowledge, and there could be no true encounter with being, only with abstract imagery. A certain idolatry arose from the concept of God as «Being» — as the «supreme being,» «the most real being» who is knowable by virtue of the analogy between God and created being. This latter heresy of *analogia* was introduced by Augustine of Hippo, and condemned by the Orthodox Church when John Italos attempted to introduce it into the Byzantine world (in 1082). Since, for the Schoolmen, God, being the unmoved mover was always «at rest» and no uncreated energies of God were understood, the quandary of the fact that God is, nevertheless, active, raised the internal contradiction of God as an active essence, but unmoved and «at rest.» The universe must, then, be maintained by created essences or beings, but not by God directly. The conceptual and theological problems that arose from all this excess of legalistic philosophy have been enormous.

Thus, Western religious thought was coloured by Augustinian Platonism,[vi] until Latin thinkers, following the end of the Dark Ages,[vii] discovered the commentaries on Aristotle by the great Moslem physician and philosopher Ibn Sina, better known to us as Avicenna (980-1037) and Ibn Roshd, whom we know as Averroës (1126-1198).

By the last half of the 1200s, Scholasticism was the main system for theologizing in the West. Scholasticism took its name from the universities, the «schools,» which at the time were ecclesiastical, or at least controlled by ecclesiastical authorities. The Scholastic movement embraced this interpreted Aristotelianism with a passion, and Aristotelian Realism became the basis of religious philosophy.[viii] Where Platonic thought sought to transcend physical reality (and desire) in pursuit of a more abstract, spiritualized ideal, Aristotle espoused rationalistic logic and sought to view nature in the context of physical reality, a concept that was essential to the birth of modern science. The great lights of this movement, Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), set about to use reason to make fine distinctions about everything in the realm of revealed theology: every teaching and dogma of the faith would be ascertained rationally through logic, and defined in minute detail (a process that would ensure a clash between religion and science in the future). For the holy fathers, on the other hand, theology is always paradoxical. Indeed «dogma» is always expressed in paradoxes, and the paradox itself helps maintain a proper perspective, preventing the kind of idolatry into which Scholasticism and modern fundamentalism fell. The paradox also helps prevent us from supposing that we understand more than can be known. They applied these principles to law also and, in fact, combined legal philosophy with religious philosophy to form the dry, legalistic and lifeless theology which bears the name of their movement: Scholasticism.[ix] The old Roman legal mind

came into play in this Aristotelian process also[x] and, blending legal and religious philosophy, the Scholastics sought to codify the mysteries of faith and the very mysteries of life itself. Introduced into this dialectical process was the principle of First Cause in which some real aspect of efficient cause (*causa efficiens*) passes into the entity of the effect. From these processes, Scholasticism developed two major errors. The first was a philosophical «system of theology» which was locked into a particular era, with its world view and mindset; and the second was codified and limited «sacraments» which placed limits on the action of grace. Truth, then, is reduced to a rational system, deduced by logic based on the principle of First Cause, rather than on the living encounters of human experience in the realm of faith.

The attempt to systematize theology removes it from its vital, existential role in the growth, transformation and ascent of man — from its actual role in the process of man's redemption. Here, they superseded the primary dimension of truth, which is human experience of life in faith, with the secondary dimension which is the reflective manner of interpreting the world. When we create such a system, we colonize the primary dimension with the «reflective system.» In this case, the system itself becomes idolatrous. One of the problems with the Scholastics was (and still is) that they tend to substitute the truth with the «wording» or «phrasing» of the truth. There is a kind of linguistic positivism in Scholastic formulations. It is as if they believe that language as a tool can actually produce «truth.» However, language obviously can only «signify» the truth. Truth cannot be derived from a set of facts, but only from meaning. By missing the difference Scholasticism became trapped in reflective analysis and in a literal understanding of «authentic» sources. Attempting to find the truth of life in formulations of any kind results in trapping life in their own inflexible patterns. This is what we often call «ideology» and we must certainly be careful to avoid understanding the faith in such a manner. The antidote to this mistake in theology cannot be subjective individual experience, obtained in a private manner. Even faith, individual and private, can be a false guide. On this ground, one may raise an objection to experience-as-knowledge attained by individual «meditation.» However, in the Church we are not alone and we are never isolated individuals. We are «in communion» with one another and with the saints, and with Christ. This «communion,» this personal mode of being, can be truly implemented in the Church. The coherence of this experience and its «authenticity» is fine-tuned by the Holy Spirit. This is, moreover, why we always look for the «consensus» of the holy fathers. This «consensus» is not just a technicality or an agreement in wording or concepts, rather it is directly related to the «coherence» brought about by the Spirit. In this sense, «coherence» can be another way of saying experience-as-

knowledge. This does not mean that all individual experience, particularly the experiences encountered by studying nature or meditating upon natural things in faith, is wrong or misleading. Such experiences very often make sense and can help people. God has not left us helpless and without some guidance. We all have a compass — the image of God imprinted on our soul. I think this is what is meant by Apostle Paul when he says that those who do not know the law do according to the law by their own nature. (The law here is a *reflection* of the truth). However the fulfilment of knowledge and coherent experience of the faith can only be trustworthily known in the Church, where Christ is not simply reflected (as through in a mirror) but is present in person.

During this time, the schools became so powerful that, in defining heresy and proper Latin doctrine, the ecclesiastical authorities became dependent upon the professors of the universities, and the schools began to infringe heavily upon the authority of the hierarchs.

**[i].** Not only the idea of «natural theology,» but also «revealed theology» was, in the West, polluted by Hellenistic philosophy.

**[ii].** He was not the first to use the Aristotelian approach. Tertullian (d.circa 221), though much more influenced by the stoics, had done so two hundred years earlier, and so had others, but Boethius was in a position to develop it and influence the process of theologizing in a more significant way.

**[iii].** For example, Augustine taught that God is being and that analogy exists between created and uncreated being.

**[iv].** And categorised as, for example, actual and habitual grace; prevenient and cooperative grace; created and uncreated grace, etc.

**[v].** I have used the term «epistemology,» although the development of this «science» was not a direct concern of the Scholastic era as it was again among later philosophers. Nevertheless, the problem is reflected in the understanding of the «way we know» and «how we know,» so I use the term in its later philosophical context.

**[vi].** Even if his influence waned, Augustine remained the «master of theology» in the West. His legacy always bore a shade of the afterglow of Manichean

Gnosticism, from which its master could never completely escape, and this is also a factor in the shaping of Western religious thought.

**[vii].** The reader should always remember that the «Dark Ages» were not so hopelessly dark as legend has it. There were no equivalent Dark Ages in the Orthodox East. During the Dark Ages of the West, the Eastern Roman Empire — Byzantium — experienced a number of cultural and intellectual peaks which seem to have just «burned out.»

**[viii].** The degree to which this is true is demonstrated in the Statutes of Oxford University. A provision, which was still on the books, at least into the 1600s, provided that scholars who did not faithfully follow Aristotle were to be fined five shillings for every point of divergence, and the same fine for every error against the logic of the *Organon*.

**[ix].** Michael Psellos (1018-1078) in Constantinople came close to introducing many elements of scholasticism in Byzantium, as did many of his contemporaries. As Panagiotis Chrestou points out, there was considerable concern about such problems in the 10-1100s in Constantinople. He observes, «The reason that the preoccupation with philosophy provoked anxiety was because it threatened the corruption of theology with philosophy and an inadvertent return to the Neoplatonism which served classical philosophy. Every effort was made to avoid this, keeping philosophy only as a preparatory civil education and not allowing it to interject into the realm of the dogmas of the faith» (***Byzantine Fathers and Theologians***— Translated from the Greek by Rev. Dr. George C. Papademetriou—Synaxis Press, Dewdney, B.C., 1997; p.18).

**[x].** See, e.g., Berman, H.J., ***Law and Revolution: the Formation of the Western Legal Tradition***, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983.