

Theology intertwines with science

By C.S. Morrissey
Special to The B.C. Catholic

Science and theology are not opposed. In fact, for St. Thomas Aquinas, theology is a science. *Scientia divina*, “divine science,” is the knowledge and wisdom that God possesses.

This divine science, insofar as we know it, goes by the name *sacra doctrina*, “sacred teaching.” The word “doctrine” (*doctrina*), then, simply means a “teaching” that can be communicated, shared, passed down. Doctrine can be taught. It is a form of knowledge.

For example, divine science knows that God is a trinity of divine persons. We could not discover this truth with our own minds, says St. Thomas. It belongs to a realm of truth that surpasses human reason. It has to be revealed to us for us to know it.

When God, by His power and initiative, shares divine knowledge with us, it supplements our merely human knowledge, adding to the truths we know by our own powers.

Scientia humana, “human science,” is the name for the sort of human knowledge we can acquire with our natural powers. In its highest form it is also called “wisdom.”

For example, human wisdom knows that you should treat people as you yourself would wish to be treated. One cannot lie or cheat one’s way to happiness. Don’t drink motor oil, or else you will get sick, and so on.

You can think of human wisdom as a smaller circle, contained entirely within divine wisdom. Our minds can take us so far, but God’s wisdom goes even farther. His circle is the bigger circle.

Where then does modern science fit in? Modern science is a specialized inquiry. It organizes its body of knowledge around experimentation and the use of special instruments. It uses mathematics to summarize and apply its results. (The philosopher Charles Peirce gave this kind of specialized science a precise name: “ideoscopic science.”)

For example, Galileo built a telescope to see the heavens. Newton wrote equations to sum up how gravity and planetary motion is observed. Einstein refined their work even further, making amazing predictions that experiments later confirmed to be true.

Besides this sort of specialized knowledge (“ideoscopic science”), which is a realm known well by only a talented few (Galileo, Newton, Einstein, etc.), there is also what Peirce called “cenoscopic science”: knowledge available to everyone, on the basis of common experience. Anyone can learn human wisdom. Experience is a great teacher. Go ask an older person.

But the success of modern “ideoscopic” science has led to an unnecessary divorce between science and theology. The “cenoscopic science” (common knowledge, based on experience accessible to all) of human wisdom has

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been downgraded in the popular mind.

This is the state of affairs that I, as a Thomist, a follower of St. Thomas, would sum up in two words: “science, interrupted.” What I mean is that the connection between “cenoscopic” and “ideoscopic” science has been disrupted by modern culture. The connection has been interrupted by a false modern philosophy that tears apart the unity of all the sciences.

In our modern culture, “ideoscopic science” (the knowledge possessed by a specialized few) is what is exalted most. We are told not to trust our common sense or everyday experience. Scientists are allegedly the highest authorities.

If you think I am exaggerating, I’m not. Just look at our use

of the word “science.” It has been hijacked to now refer only to modern science (“ideoscopic science”). Our culture thinks of experimental science as the only real science.

But, as we have seen, the traditional conception is that theology and philosophy (divine and human wisdom) are sciences too. They are doctrines, teachable things, real wisdoms: true sciences too.

C.S. Morrissey is an assistant professor of philosophy at Redeemer Pacific College.

This is Part 1 of a summary of a talk he gave June 19 at the “Catholic After Hours” Church history seminar series at the Irish Heather Pub in Gastown. Part 2 will appear in a future issue of “The B.C. Catholic.” □



St. Thomas Aquinas is depicted in a painting at the Dominican House of Studies in Washington. The Dominican philosopher and theologian’s writings set the standard for Catholic theologians.

Nancy Wiehenc / CNS

Letters to the Editor

CCODP compromise scandalous

Re: Andrew Conradi’s article on CCODP in the July 4 issue:

I agree that Canadian bishops need to give the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace clearer direction and guidelines as to which groups the Share Lent collection can support, as well as more transparency and accountability in reporting to Canadian Catholics about the kind of work being done in the global South.

I don’t understand how CCODP can collaborate with global South partners, like Pro DH, who feel abortion can be tolerated in certain circumstances, just because their intentions are good, and helping them is not directly promoting any “evil” that might be inherent in their policies.

Surely there must be enough thoroughly Catholic groups working in the global South for justice and peace who can be supported without having to justify or turn a blind eye to some of the groups’ methods that are clearly in opposition to Catholic doctrine.

How do the groups who do not share our pro-life values view our willingness to support them, even though they surely are aware of where the Church stands on abortion and artificial contraception?

I find that kind of compromise by the CCODP scandalous.

**Loretta Draper
Pitt Meadows**

Permanent record left out there

I read with interest “Father prepares daughter for dating world” in the July 11 issue about a well-meaning Toronto dad, Noel Ocol, teaching his daughters about “chivalry and respect.”

Mr. Ocol’s blog detailing outings with his daughter is a carefully constructed one-man siege against troubling features of teen sex and “modern pop culture.” He takes parenting seriously, that is clear. But this blog is worrisome.

Mr. Ocol has given away his daughters’ right to privacy without their consent. Do his girls need a public (and permanent) record on the Internet of personal moments in their young lives?

Thank goodness I was a teen in the pre-Internet 1980s. There is no cringe-worthy blog about Dad giving me dating advice.

**T. van Riemsdijk
Vancouver**

Conversation must be with God

The headline “Don’t stop talking in church,” by Father Vincent Hawksell in the June 20 issue should have been “Don’t stop talking in church to God in prayer.” The first one is misleading, so some people would not bother reading on.

Our church bulletin had an article, “Why there should be silence in the church,” which was also explained from the pulpit by Father. The unnecessary talking to others, laughing, socializing, etc., before, during, and after Mass still went on.

There has to be a joint effort by all adults, especially the leaders in the parish, for this silence to work so we can talk to God. I am with Father Hawksell in “shocked disbelief.” Recently I heard talking, not just in normal tones; one yelled, another laughed aloud, and they could be heard over the singing of the recessional hymn.

Another time there were two people standing in the pews chatting, one with her back to altar, with people praying on their knees around them, while they talked for

longer than 10 minutes.

It has become impossible to pray after Mass.

**Marlene Vanderhoek
Abbotsford**

That happened to me; I hung up

I read with great interest Peter Vogel’s Tech Wise article in the July 4 issue about his student who had someone on the phone wanting to fix his computer. I received the same phone call, right down to the same wording, about three months ago.

Now I, in my 70s, am not as computer savvy as the student, but I felt my hackles rising when the caller instructed me to turn on my computer so he could “fix” my virus problems. At that moment I remembered all the warnings I had seen and heard about hackers and quickly told him, “Thanks very much, but I have my own people that can do that for me” and quickly hung up, as I didn’t want to engage in further conversation with him.

Reading the article made me realize that it was the right thing to do at the time. Thank you.

**Bridget Nairn
Port Coquitlam**

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