GOD’S WISDOM AND HUMAN REASON

The development of theology as a discipline in medieval times

B Gaybba
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(EIGHTH TO TENTH CENTURIES)

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Introduction

The present work is intended as an introduction to the main aspects of the development of theology as a discipline in medieval times. Although theology was to become a recognizable academic discipline only in the eighteenth century, nevertheless the beginnings of the successive trends in becoming such can be traced back to Carolingian times— which is why our story begins there.

Moreover, as becoming an academic discipline it rests on an intellectual objectivity and subordinates itself to the exigencies of rational discourse that might abandon the more traditional patristic approach, one that focused onto what has come to be known as monastic theology and which was doomed to be displaced soon after its birth by what has come to be known as scholastic theology. The difference between the two was the difference between a way of investigating that put a premium on symbolism, spiritual experience and— above all — love as the route to understanding, over against one that concentrated on the literal, the conceptual and — above all — rational argumentation as the route to understanding. However, it would be wrong to imagine that the externally oriented scholastic form of theology disregarded the importance of symbolism, spiritual experience and love as routes to understanding. The importance of these factors was recognised — but for the individual believer's own faith life. The factors themselves were regarded by scholastic theology as being too subjective to be appealed to in theological argumentation. Hence the central section of our exposition of the rise of
Introduction

The present work is intended as an introduction to the main aspects of the development of theology as a discipline in medieval times. Although theology was to become a recognisable academic discipline only in the twelfth century, nevertheless the beginnings of the movement towards its becoming such can be traced back to Carolingian renaissance – which is why our story begins there.

Moreover, in becoming an academic discipline it took on an intellectual objectivity and subjected itself to the rigours of rational discourse that meant abandoning the more traditional patristic approach, one that flowered into what has come to be known as monastic theology and which was doomed to be displaced soon after its zenith by what has come to be known as scholastic theology. The difference between the two was the difference between a way of theologising that put a premium on symbolism, spiritual experience and – above all – love as the route to understanding, over against one that concentrated on the literal, the conceptual and – above all – rational argumentation as the route to understanding. However, it would be wrong to imagine that the rationally oriented scholastic form of theology disregarded the importance of symbolism, spiritual experience and love as routes to understanding. The importance of these factors was recognised – but for the individual believer’s own faith life. The factors themselves were regarded by scholastic theology as being too subjective to be appealed to in theological argumentation. Hence the central section of our exposition of the rise of
theology as an academic discipline will be sandwiched in between two sections in which the importance of love for understanding was recognised.

In the first such section, the recognition of love's ability to illuminate is at the centre of monastic theology's way of doing theology. In the second and closing section it has been relegated to an area of theology known as 'the Gifts of the Holy Spirit'. In this latter section, therefore, it is no longer part of the story of theology as an academic discipline. But it is worth studying, since in our own day the gap between the knowledge of the head and the knowledge of the heart that became characteristic of academic theology is being closed again and in the medieval theology of wisdom as a gift of the Spirit we find the ongoing tradition of an epistemological role that Christian theology has granted to love ever since the time of Augustine – indeed, ever since biblical times (cf, eg, 1 Jn 2:10ff).

Finally, some comments on the sources for the material that follows are in order. Much of it is taken from previous University of South Africa publications of mine. Those, therefore, who wish to find more details on the material in chapters 2, 4, 5 and 6 can consult Gaybba 1984. And those who wish to find more details on the material in chapters 3 and 7 will find them in Gaybba 1988. The material in chapter 8 is based on research published in Gaybba 1994. As regards the final chapter (chapter 9), the hitherto unpublished material is part of the fruits of a research programme funded by the Centre for Science Development in 1995, though it must be stressed that the opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at there are mine and cannot be attributed to the CSD.
The revival of learning (eighth to tenth centuries)

The collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century led to a collapse in educational institutions that was nothing less than catastrophic. Schools of learning on any appreciable scale almost disappeared. Indeed, from a lay perspective they did disappear — Boethius was the last well-educated layperson for centuries. Such centres of learning as did exist were to be found within Church circles, since the Church was the only stable institution during the resultant upheavals. Ecclesiastical administrative structures required at least a modicum of learning to be maintained. Moreover, the clergy had to be able to read the scriptures and carry out the liturgical functions appertaining to their office. Then there had to be at least some who had sufficient skills in astronomy to be able to compute the dates of the feasts that depended on the lunar and solar calendars. Learning did not disappear entirely, therefore, and the older castigation of the period as being one of fairly unrelieved barbarism from an educational point of view has been abandoned by historians. Nevertheless, the decline in educational standards was marked. It is therefore impossible to overestimate the importance of Charlemagne’s decision towards the end of the eighth century to enforce the re-establishment of schools of learning in every diocese. With that decision, learning began to revive in western Europe. The syllabus laid down was the old trivium (ie ‘three subjects’, namely grammar, rhetoric and dialectics) and quadrivium (ie ‘four subjects’, namely music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy).

The renaissance itself was short-lived. A steady progress did not follow.
stead, further political upheavals after Charlemagne's death led to the breakdown of much that he had achieved. However, it was a regression and not an eclipse. Intellectual activity in fact continued to a far greater extent than used to be believed (Marenbon 1981:139). For example, one fruit of the renaissance was that theological debates arose of a type the West had not seen for a very long time: debates over predestination, over Christ's presence in the Eucharist, etc. However, after a relatively brief flowering of intense intellectual activity the accent fell on preservation rather than innovation (cf Grabmann 1909:179).

The reasons for this basically preservative character of our period are not too difficult to find. First of all, lacking the philosophical stimulation that had marked earlier centuries, the natural reaction was to use the limited intellectual resources of the time to preserve rather than innovate. But there was another, more theological, reason which underpinned the natural conservatism of the times and this was the authority that had come to be ascribed to the past. The basis for this authority was the conviction that the Spirit had been at work in the Church, helping it to remain faithful to the truth committed to it. In particular the Spirit was seen as guiding those who were now revered as 'holy fathers' of the faith, enabling them to explain and illuminate that faith. The teachings of these Fathers came to be increasingly revered and unquestioned and theology became mostly a matter of interpreting the scriptures through their eyes and using the only secular tool that seemed useful for that purpose – grammar.

That theology was seen as being essentially the interpretation of the scriptures was something bequeathed to medieval times by the patristic period (Congar 1968:51). It would remain the basic way in which theology was conceived right into the thirteenth century and indeed the scriptures would remain the most important foundation for theology for most of the medieval period. Hence the favourite term for what we today call theology was sacra pagina, 'sacred page' or simply sacra scriptura, that is 'sacred scripture'.

Needless to say, the mentality with which theologians of this period approached the scriptures differed radically from that of a modern scientific exegete. As in the patristic period, theologians approached the Bible with the conviction that it was the inspired record of their own faith. They therefore felt perfectly free to see in it what the Church already actually believed. Bible and Church were not opposed to each other, as later came to be so. Moreover,
their exegesis occurred within a Platonist-inspired framework of thought, in which the visible world was the symbol of the invisible one. This had already in patristic times led to a style of exegesis in which the emphasis was on the non-literal meaning of the text, its 'spiritual' meaning, as it would later come to be known. Such a process also made it possible to show the biblical bases for doctrines and practices that had developed over the centuries and for which explicit biblical testimony was lacking.

This stress on commentary was itself a form of pedagogy that they inherited from classical times — interestingly enough from a period (fourth century) when cultural decay led to a stress on preserving and commenting on classical secular texts from the past. As Smalley (1952:26) writes:

Fourth-century men of letters were concentrating on the reading and interpretation of classical literature, yet they were literal rather than literary in their approach to it. Professors expounded the poems of Virgil not as a whole but, after a short introduction, piecemeal, line by line, or even word by word. They dwelt particularly on grammar which was always their main preoccupation, then commented on the historical, mythological, or topographical details mentioned in the passage under review... These same tendencies reappear inevitably in patristic, and through them in medieval, commentaries on Scripture.

During this period the typical form of theological activity was, therefore, reading the biblical text and commenting on it. Hence it literally took the form of a lectio ('reading') and the teacher was a lector ('reader'), whence our term 'lecturer'.

As noted above, the authoritative guide to the interpretation of the scriptures was, for the theologians of this period, the Fathers. This led to the continuation and flowering of an earlier practice, namely the compiling of extracts from the writings of the Fathers. Such compilations became the characteristic written form of theological work during this period. The earlier and especially the less systematic collections were called florilegia ('collections of flowers', a sort of 'bouquet' of patristic wisdom). But the name that became the most common one for such collections was sententiae ('viewpoints'), a term translated as 'sentences'. These collections would contribute considerably to the full-scale revival of theology and would do so in two ways. First of all, they provided a quarry of information for the researcher. Second, the setting down alongside each other of various patristic opinions
on a particular topic served to highlight discrepancies between these au­thorities, which in turn would lead to a move away from the idea of theology as being simply a commentary on sacred texts (see below).

Precisely because theology was chiefly a matter of interpreting texts – the Scriptures but also patristic texts (Chenu 1957b:19) – theologians of the time naturally sought whatever tools they could find for interpreting texts. The main tool they had at their disposal was the first of the subjects making up the trivium: grammar. As our period progresses, dialectics will also be used and increasingly so, but until the eleventh century its use will be minimal in comparison to that made of grammar (Chenu 1957b:19).

Grammar is the science of how to communicate your meaning in language. It is the science that analyses the structure of sentences (subject, predicate, object, etc), the role played by types of word (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc), the use of figures of speech (similes, metaphors, etc), and so on. The main grammars studied by the medievals were those written by Donatus (fourth century AD) and Priscian (beginning of sixth century). These works were composed as studies of Latin grammar and not as guidelines to theologians. Hence, the conscious, deliberate use of these disciplines by theologians marks the beginnings of the medieval road that theology took to becoming an academic discipline – that is to say, a discipline that had an agreed-upon method of work and tools of analysis that would prevent it from being simply the outpouring of an individual’s own views on the faith.

But already there was a reaction to the use of grammar. Some saw it as an alien intrusion into the realm of the sacred. How can the expressions of our sacred faith, some asked, be allowed to be judged by the laws and procedures of human language? Some argued that since God knew more grammar than people like Donatus, one cannot examine the divinely inspired biblical words using such grammarians as guides (Chenu 1957b:18–19). Such debates may seem extraordinary to us nowadays, but they were the struggles of people beginning to grapple for the first time for centuries with the issue of the relationship between reason and faith.

In the eleventh century the use of logical analysis, in the form of dialectics, would increase to the point where it would become a major bone of con­tention between the older, symbolic, experientially oriented way of doing theology and the newer, logically exact, conceptually focused way of doing it.
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(EIGHTH TO TENTH CENTURIES)

It would be a fight to the death, so to speak, since the latter would be the ultimate victor.

In what follows let us first look, then, at the golden age of the older way of doing theology, a way that came to be called ‘monastic theology’. After that we will trace the origins and development of the newer way, the way that came to be called ‘scholastic theology’.
Older ways: the role of experience and monastic theology (twelfth century)

3.1 Introduction

The term ‘monastic theology’ was coined by Jean Leclercq (see Leclercq 1957) to refer to a type of theology that achieved its golden age in the twelfth century but which represented the more traditional, patristic approach to the way theology should go about its business. It was a theology marked by a stress on symbolism, biblical categories and, above all, on the central role played by love in bringing about an understanding of the Christian faith.

Leclercq called this theology ‘monastic’ because, as he put it, ‘the monks were its most numerous, most consistent, and had within their ranks its most eminent practitioners’ (Leclercq 1964:54). It was a form of theology that meshed perfectly with the sort of contemplative life that was the major preoccupation of its monastic practitioners.

In contrast to the type of theology favoured by the dialecticians, where logical analysis of ideas occupied pride of place, the most marked characteristic of monastic theology was the pride of place given to spiritual experience within
it. This in turn was closely linked to its symbolic character, for the ideas analysed by the dialecticians were for the monks symbolic windows through which the soul came into contact with the heavenly world that alone could illuminate the mind. Monastic theology's emphasis on experiencing God raises the issue of the epistemological divide that was opening up between the new, dialectical breed of theologians (whom we will examine in the next few chapters) and the older, monastic type of theology. For the former, understanding the faith was primarily an intellectual process, utilising the tools of logical analysis and the fruits of reason (what we today call secular knowledge). For the latter, understanding the faith was primarily an affective process, the result of the illumination brought by love.

In what follows, therefore, we will examine first of all the experiential and character of monastic theology. Thereafter we will look at the epistemological role played by love. Finally, we will conclude with some remarks on the differences between this older way of doing theology and the newer way being paved by the dialecticians.

3.2 An experiential theology

Monastic theology was through and through a theology built on experiencing, 'tasting' (as they loved to call it) God. Such a knowledge of God was superior to any knowledge one could gain from an academic analysis of biblical or patristic texts or from using one's dialectical skills to analyse a particular doctrine. As Bernard of Clairvaux wrote: 'The touch of experience is necessary for understanding' (*In Cantica* XX:878). And elsewhere: 'Only holiness can bring comprehension, not debates ... Do you ask how? If you were holy, you would comprehend and know. If not, then become holy and you will know through experience' (*De consid* V, xiv:805). The same point is made again and again by other monastic writers of the period. Thus William of St Thierry writes, as regards understanding the Trinity: 'We teach our lips to utter and our hearts to ponder, as often as we may wish, both the Lord's words and our theoretical and practical explanations of them. However, even though we may wish to do so very often, we will never understand them other than through an affective experience and an inner sense of illuminated love' (*Speculum*:396). William is simply repeating the sort of point Augustine made centuries earlier when he linked love of God and neighbour with
coming to a deeper understanding of the processions of the divine persons within the trinity (cf Gaybba 1985:109–110).

That monastic theology should stress the role of experience was, of course, only natural. The very aim of the monastic way of life was a mystical union with God. It was a way of life structured to enable the individual to experience the delights of unity with God. Knowledge about God was of lesser importance than knowledge of God. But the experiential bent of such theology also had very deep philosophical roots — the neo-Platonist framework that affected so much of the way in which for centuries now Christians had thought about the relationship between the divine and the human and the way in which the former was known by the latter. As I noted elsewhere, ‘it is impossible to understand monastic theology — and the opposition that grew up between it and the Abelardian type of scholasticism that burgeoned in the twelfth century — without having some familiarity with neo-Platonic thought... The idea that all things issue from a transcendent One in varying, hierarchically ordered, stages; that the One is present in all things and the source of a fundamental conformity between them and it; that aversion from the One reduces one’s unity with and therefore likeness to it; that conversion to and contemplation of it effects the opposite — to the point where one achieves complete unity with it; an epistemology in which the divine is known only by experiencing it through connaturality [that is, becoming similar in nature to it]; the central, illuminating role of love by unifying and conforming one to the divine — all this was part of the air the monks breathed’ (Gaybba 1988:10).

The degree of academic maturity of any theology can be measured by the extent to which it is conscious of and examines its own presuppositions and methodology. It is therefore a sign of the maturity of monastic theology that several of its practitioners pondered the epistemological presuppositions of a theology that places experiencing the divine at the very heart of its methodology. Thus they explored, within the confines of their limited knowledge, the psychological structure of the human soul so as to pinpoint the very faculty that experienced God. This was, in their view, a faculty superior to the imagination as well as to ratiocinatory reason. A favourite term for this faculty was intelligentia, which is perhaps best translated as ‘insight’. Its specific way of operating was through experiential contact. Reason, it was said, touches only the outside of things, intelligentia their very source: God.
However, experiential knowledge of God did not operate as a source by providing the theologian with a direct vision of God or of ideas about God. The main ideas and the images were provided by scripture. What experiential knowledge did was to enable the theologian to understand the depths of meaning present in those ideas and images — in much the same way as one who has experienced deep love will understand the depths of meaning to the concept ‘love’.

However, clearly the process of understanding the depths of meaning in an idea often involves having new insights into such ideas. And these insights will come to be expressed in further ideas and images. Hence some sort of norm was required whereby one could judge the conformity of those ideas to the apostolic faith. The norm was, of course, simply those very scriptures, the depths of whose meaning were plumbed by their experiences of God. And, of course, an authoritative guide to the scriptures was at hand in the writings of the Fathers. As we saw, it was universally accepted that scripture had a figurative as well as a literal sense, and the figurative sense was the one most appealed to. To our modern minds this is not much of a control. Nevertheless, within the confines of their own outlook a norm was appealed to, and the norm was scripture. Richard of St Victor provides us with an interesting example of all this. He makes a comparison between the experiencing or tasting of God and the Mount Tabor scene, as it was traditionally known (Mt 17:1ff), and notes that Moses and Elias were witnesses to the revelation of Christ to the disciples (Ben Min LXXXI:57). So too, he continues, the knowledge obtained from contemplation can be accepted as being from Christ only if ‘Moses’ and ‘Elias’ — that is, scripture in its literal and figurative senses — testify to its veracity.

3.3 A symbolic theology

A symbolist outlook — that is, one that saw the visible, earthly world as a symbolic embodiment of the invisible, heavenly one — was common to all theological thinking up to and including the twelfth century. It was part and parcel of the Platonist framework that formed the common culture of the times. It is an outlook that will be abandoned as an Aristotelian worldview replaces the Platonist one and a new academic type of theology to be known as ‘scholasticism’ replaces completely the older ways. But for monastic
theology such an outlook was so central to its way of reflecting on the faith that the demise of the former would coincide with the demise of the latter.

This symbolist outlook was characterised by the conviction that the world around us and everything in it is a pointer to a more transcendent world that lies beyond it and which makes its presence felt in and through every created reality around us (see Chenu 1957a:161). What is important is that that transcendent world and the way to understand it is not so much through logical argumentation as through developing the ability to see through the symbol, to be able to follow its character as a pointer to what lies beyond it.

Such an outlook has its remote roots in Plato's philosophy, more specifically the neo-Platonist form given it by Plotinus and Christianised by thinkers such as Augustine and, above all, Pseudo-Denys. Within this philosophical framework, the only true realities are eternal ones. All else is but a reflection - in varying degrees - of these eternal entities. For Augustine, this meant that any created reality could and should remind one of some or other aspect of God's world. For Pseudo-Denys it also meant that within any created reality the believer's mind should be able to see the presence of that world. While there is an unbridgeable gulf for the Christian believer between God and creation, nevertheless there is some continuity too. 'The created world was hierarchically ordered into various degrees of reality, each of which was distinguished according to the extent of its conformity to God. Angels were therefore at the top, matter at the bottom of the ladder. Moreover, each degree was a theophany, a symbol of the one superior to it, while the latter made itself known to the degree below it symbolically. Reality was therefore basically symbolical in structure. And this was true of God too. The Word was the symbol - that is to say, the real expression - of the Father. The Spirit was the symbol (that is, the expression) of their mutuality' (Gaybba 1985:19).

Because some symbols point us to the divine more aptly than others, the theologian is obviously expected to concentrate on the former rather than the latter. And as regards the former, those that have been chosen by God for God's self-manifestation to humanity would occupy pride of place. These are the events of salvation history as narrated in the scriptures; the church and its structures, the sacraments, especially the liturgy of the eucharist. These symbols are not necessarily any clearer than purely natural symbols, such as a field or a sunset. But they are symbols used by God and therefore the places where we can expect to find God. There is a foreshadowing here of Karl
Barth’s idea of an ‘analogy of faith’ and of his insistence that having experienced God’s presence in the preaching of the Word it is to the testimony to that Word (that is, the scriptures) that we must look again and again for hearing and understanding what God wishes to communicate to us.

Among the above symbols there are two that were of particular importance to the monks. Both existed because of God’s grace-filled presence in the believer. The first was the believer’s own soul, transformed by the indwelling presence of Father, Son and Spirit. The second was the love that this grace created within the believer. Hence the importance placed on getting to know oneself—that is, getting to know what God has created within one. “Where, I ask, can traces of the knowledge of God be more clearly found than stamped on God’s own image?” (Anonymous, *De interiori* VI:513; cf Gaybba 1988:13)

Since the soul is by nature God’s image and by grace God’s very likeness, one knows the best image there is of God on this earth. The likeness deepens when the soul loves and the more one loves, the greater the likeness—since God is love.

The knowledge—and the experience (since the two go together for monastic theology)—of God gained in this way is fleshed out through one’s meditation on the scriptures and the church’s beliefs and one’s prayer-filled participation in the celebration of the sacred rites, above all the eucharist.

As can be seen, a symbolist theology is essentially a contemplative one. That is to say, its main aim is to achieve as deep an understanding as possible of divine realities. The world is of no real interest to a symbolist theologian, except to the extent that it mediates a knowledge of the divine. Within this framework of thought, the world lacks any meaning in itself. One cannot expect to find anything of lasting value there. The world’s usefulness begins and ends by being a window to the divine. Concentrate too much on the world and your spiritual vision becomes blurred, ending up in spiritual blindness. For it is only by concentrating one’s mind on God that one will be able to see how God is revealed through the symbolic structure of creation. The world has no ability in itself to reveal the divine to us. It is the divine that reveals itself to us through the world. If the world has no ability to reveal the divine to us, this means that the ideas and images found in the world cannot of themselves give us a proper insight into the things of God. The most they can do is to point to the divine, of which they are a mere symbol. Only once
one has experienced the divine can one then begin to see the depths of meaning in the symbol.

Anyone, therefore, who thinks that he or she can illuminate the divine adequately simply by analysing concepts and texts is making a fundamental epistemological mistake. And this in turn meant that a symbolist theology took a quite different approach to theological method from that which was being adopted by the dialecticians and which would become characteristic of scholastic theology. Whereas for the latter one worked through a process of logical reasoning, ensuring that one clarified as precisely as possible the ideas one was working with, for monastic theology one worked through a process of association of ideas, a process of seeing the various levels of meaning that one can find in a symbol. It was, moreover, a process that had to go hand in hand with a life of love for God, so that the divine can be ‘tasted’, experienced, and in that way illuminate the symbols one is working with. Whereas for scholasticism precise definition of one’s ideas was essential, for monastic theology the more flexible the symbol the more useful it was for their purposes. Whereas for scholasticism the proper approach was to show the logical connection between one idea and another, for monastic theology the proper approach was to show the symbolic connection between them. Logical reasoning demands abandoning the flexibility of a symbol, so as to reduce it to a precisely defined concept. This was one of the reasons for monastic theology’s dislike of dialectics as a theological tool. It attempted to destroy the ultimate mysteriousness of the divine, a mysteriousness that can only manifest itself in symbols. As mentioned above, the scholastic approach seemed to the monks to be based on a fundamental epistemological error – the assumption that a logical analysis of ideas about God will give us a deeper understanding of God.

It was typical of this symbolist approach that the non-literal meanings of scripture were valued as the most important. This was the age of the dominance of scripture’s ‘spiritual meaning’. Such a meaning is not necessarily tied to a Platonist epistemology of the type that underpinned monastic theology – non-literal interpretations are essential for any community whose sacred texts remain unchanged over the course of centuries. But a whole structure of ‘spiritual meanings’ was inherited from patristic times that fitted perfectly a symbolist approach – and which would come under increasing pressure as a more scholastic method came to dominate theology. Built onto the ‘natural’ or ‘literal sense’, there was the tropological sense, which was the
moral significance of a particular biblical text; the allegorical sense, which was the understanding it gave of a particular Christian belief or set of beliefs; and then the anagogical sense, which was the understanding it gave of God. These spiritual senses were themselves arranged hierarchically — beginning with the tropological, moving through the allegorical, so as to reach the summit of meaning — the insight offered into the divine itself. Moving from one sense to another, the monastic theologian was therefore engaged in an exercise whereby his mind moved from the inferior to the superior until it was focused on its true object — God.

To us such an approach may seem so vulnerable to subjective considerations as to be useless as a serious way of going about doing theology. However, such a judgement would be too harsh, since there were some controls. One has to recall that the faith being explored by the monastic theologians had a reasonably well-defined content and therefore constituted its own sort of control. Moreover, there was an attempt at providing some sort of objective assessment of the meanings of the more frequently used symbols. In the second half of the twelfth century the accepted meanings of particular symbols were collected into alphabetically arranged lists called *distinctiones*. One could then look up a word such as ‘field’ and discover the various things it could symbolise — for example the world, a good work, scripture, preaching, the Jewish people, the church, etc, etc (Anonymous, *Allegoriae*, 854–855; cf Gaybba 1988:29). But there nevertheless remained a great deal of room for fanciful flights of imagination and Hugh of St Victor saw the need to stress the importance of the literal sense as the basis on which to build all other interpretations (Chenu 1957a:201). It is significant that Hugh stands as a twelfth-century example of a more balanced approach between the contending extremes of dialecticians and anti-dialecticians (see Gaybba 1984:125ff).

### 3.4 The epistemological role of love

For monastic theology it is impossible to understand God and the things of God without love — more precisely without that graced love that is God’s gift to the believer and which is known as *caritas* (the English translation ‘charity’ no longer conveys its proper meaning). Love is one of the two ‘eyes’ that the soul possesses. It is the ‘right-hand’ eye, the superior one, the one whereby we contemplate heavenly realities. The other eye is ratiocinatory reason,
whereby we investigate the created world. ‘The soul has two eyes, one with which it understands [has insight], the other with which it investigates things ... Of these two the right-handed eye is love ... Take away ... love, the right-handed eye, and the intellect (the left-hand eye) is left to itself, good for nothing but error’ (Anonymous *De charitate*, III:592).

The two ‘eyes’ idea has its roots in Augustine’s distinction between a superior and an inferior faculty of knowledge, of which the former is turned towards heavenly eternal realities, the latter towards earthly transitory ones. The idea that love illuminates and that it is essential to the process of understanding God and the things of God was also developed by Augustine. Moreover, all the key ideas of Augustine’s own views on the subject are to be found in monastic theology (on Augustine’s views see Gaybba 1985). In this matter too we are in the presence of a thoroughly traditional approach to theology.

The twelfth-century theologian who dealt most explicitly and frequently with this topic was William of St Thierry (cf Gaybba 1988:34–35). Love for him is the soul’s ‘natural light for seeing God, one created by the author of nature’ (*De natura amoris*, VIII:393). ‘Love loves because it sees. For it is the eye that beholds God’ (*De natura amoris* VI:390). Reason and love must work together. Reason provides love with its conceptual knowledge of God. But it is love that provides the full understanding of the reality being expressed in that conceptual knowledge. In this sense ‘reason teaches love, and love illuminates reason’ (*De natura amoris*, VIII:393). But of the two it is love that is the more important ‘eye’, the one that brings true insight into the things of God, ‘since even if reason is left behind, pious love becomes its own understanding’and in that way ‘the piety of the simplest lover ... excels the sagacity of the most erudite reasoner’ (*Super Cantica* II:525).

Love is crucial, then, for knowing God. Without it, one will inevitably fall into hopeless error. With it one is protected from such error. The most extraordinary expression of this latter conviction that I came across was the following remark by Rupert of Deutz: ‘I love the blessed Trinity and therefore know for certain that when speaking of it I will never stray beyond the truth’ (*In Cantica*). But love is essential for a true understanding of earthly realities as well. For one cannot understand such realities properly without seeing the connection between them and the God who created them. Recall the point made by the anonymous author quoted above: ‘Take away ... love, the right-handed eye, and the intellect (the left-hand eye) is left to itself, good for
nothing but error'. The root error is not so much about factual mistakes but rather about the importance and the basic character of created reality. Thus, having Romans 1:19 in mind, William of St Thierry comments: ‘Those who lose theology [that is, wisdom, the knowledge of God] make appalling errors even about physics [that is, the things of this world], since they confuse the glory of the incorruptible God with the image of corruptible humanity’ (*De natura amoris* XIV:404).

What sort of knowledge does love bring about? It is not a greater increase in factual knowledge about God but rather a deeper grasp of the factual knowledge one already has. It is often compared to the knowledge one has of a friend or a beloved spouse (see William of St Thierry, *Speculum*: 392; for more references cf Gaybba 1988:36). It is really the experiential colouring of a conceptual knowledge that one already has. I have already quoted the more obvious example that it is only through experience that we come to understand the depths of meaning in the concept ‘love’.

Nevertheless, such an experiential colouring of our conceptual knowledge of God must have some effect on the conceptual level. If it does not – for example by enabling one to see connections between concepts not noticed before – then it is difficult to understand what is meant here by ‘knowledge’.

What is it about love that gives it this privileged epistemological role in knowing the divine? What is it about love that enables it to illuminate? Here too the essential answers were already given by Augustine: love can win from God, as a reward, a deeper insight into the things of God; love can evoke the desire to know the beloved more fully and in that way focus the mind more sharply on the beloved; love purifies the mind’s ‘eye’; love unites lover and beloved; love conforms the lover to the beloved (cf Gaybba 1988:36ff). Of these four ways in which love brings about greater understanding, the first two are really extrinsic to the process of knowing. For the knowledge that comes is not itself part of the act of loving and could – in principle – be achieved without loving. With love’s ability to unite and conform, however, these characteristics of love are intrinsic to the very act of knowing that is proper to love. It is therefore these latter two aspects of love that the monastic theologians concentrate on, when they reflect on how love brings about a deeper knowledge of the divine.

Precisely because love unites the believer to God, it enables an experiential knowledge of God to occur. Just as seeing a tree or tasting some food gives
one an experiential knowledge of trees and food that is far superior to any conceptual knowledge of them, so too experiencing God through the unity with God forged by love is far superior to any conceptual knowledge of God. This experience of God's presence typically manifests itself in what mystics repeatedly called ‘tasting’ God, the gustus that signalled the presence of God. Such a taste or gustus was not simply a pleasure derived from loving and being loved but rather a sign of the presence of God within one, of the unity that love had forged between the believer and God. Truth is also Goodness and Goodness is also Truth. Hence the Truth to which love unites the believer is pleasurable and the source of the gustus that signals God's presence. ‘Rational minds can perceive internal and eternal realities by means of love alone. They perceive such realities by love so that, by tasting them, they may understand them and, by following them, make them their own’ (Hugh of St Victor, In Hierarchiam, IV:1001).

The way in which God's presence was conceived was in line with the traditional Christian belief about the indwelling of Father, Son and Spirit in the believer. William of St Thierry analysed the relationship between that belief and the epistemological role of love in a way that is astonishing in its richness and the depths it can give to a theology of the economic trinity. For William, the believer's love is purified and transformed into the Spirit's likeness. That Spirit was for Augustine the Love binding Father and Son to each other. Having transformed the believer's love into its own likeness, that love now becomes part of the very love binding Father and Son to each other. As a result the believer now knows Father and the Son the way they know each other – that is, through the experiential contact created by love. ‘The knowledge that Father and Son have reciprocally is nothing other than their unity, namely the Holy Spirit.’ Since the believer shares in that unity when his or her love has been transformed by the Spirit into the image of the Spirit, the believer is able to know Father and Son in the same way that they know each other (William of St Thierry, Speculum, 393).

As can be seen, William links the unifying and conforming powers of love. Although conceptually distinct they were seen as being two sides of a single coin. Unity and conformity were seen as correlative concepts – the closer the unity, the greater the conformity, and vice versa. The idea that love transforms the lover into the image of that which it loves was a very old idea – going right back to Augustine and beyond. ‘Such is the power of love that it is necessary for you to become like that which you love. The fellowship of love
somehow or other transforms you into the likeness of the one to whom you are bound by bonds of affection' (Hugh of St Victor, Soliloquium:954). William of St Thierry theorised that love is like a sense-faculty that knows by moulding itself onto the reality sensed. 'When the soul or sentient faculty reaches out to sense something, in the act of sensation it is changed into the reality sensed ... Now as regards the things of God, the mind's sense faculty is love' (Speculum:390—391). William is here using the explanations of sensation offered by the physics of his time. But the essential point is that the act of loving God conforms one ever deeper to the God who is loved.

Here we are at the heart of love's epistemological power: for, according to the ancient Greeks, like can only be known by like. The more we love the more godlike we become, since God is love. The more godlike we become, the more we understand the things of God. Even on a natural level this would be true. Transposed into a situation where God's grace brings the believer into the heart of God's own triune life the principle came to be seen as almost self-evident in monastic theology.

Love's power to illuminate the things of God derives therefore from the fact that it unites the believer with God and simultaneously forges a greater likeness between the believer and God. Unity and conformity increase and decrease proportionately and both do so to the degree that one loves.

3.5 The old and the new

The approach of monastic theology to theological reflection differed radically from that which was developing among those for whom the use of secular disciplines such as dialectics was seen as a major way of achieving a deeper understanding of the faith. Although no one at the time realized it, two world views and two epistemologies were clashing. The one, neo-Platonic, saw the world as but a symbol of a transcendent reality that could be known through immediate experience, and from which light streamed into our minds to understand the symbol. The other, more Aristotelian in spirit, saw the world as valuable in itself, worth understanding in and for itself and, indeed, capable of being understood without any reference to a transcendent reality or need of a transcendent illumination of the mind. This divide became clearer in the thirteenth century. But in the twelfth the monastic theologians experienced it above all at the one point where their epistemol-
ogy and spirituality met: love. To do theology their way, love was essential. To do it the dialecticians’ way, it was not. That was the rub’ (Gaybba 1988:47).

Of course, the emerging scholastic and the older monastic ways of doing theology were not irreconcilable. One finds the two ways combined not only in the twelfth century Victorine, Hugh of St Victor, but also in the thirteenth-century contemporary of Aquinas, Bonaventure.

No scholastic would have denied that, all other things being equal, the theologian who loves God and his or her neighbour is likely to have a deeper insight into the things of God and therefore be a better theologian than one who does not. But their way of doing theology demanded precision in one’s concepts, the analysis of issues, debating the pros and cons of a particular point of view, including posing and attempting to respond to objections that can be made against every Christian belief. Scholasticism’s insights have to stand on their own arguments. In a typical case of such argumentation, the points pro and contra a case are put, the matter resolved, and the objections answered. All the reasons for the positions taken are there to see, to be analysed. There is no hidden factor appealed to, such as experience or love. Logically, therefore, the scholastic system could operate quite well without appealing to love’ (Gaybba 1988:56).

Moreover, monastic theologians in general recognised that secular learning and even the use of disciplines such as dialectics could have their value for the faith – even if a Rupert of Deutz was the ultimate triumphalist in insisting that the proper way to learn how to use the secular arts is to study the way scripture uses them (cf Gaybba 1988:48ff). But they saw the disputes that excited the dialecticians as a sign of pride and disrespect for the Word of God, since what appeared to interest the dialecticians were ideas and winning arguments, rather than contemplating and coming to a deeper unity with the God who is love. For monastic theology, love was crucial. A monastic theologian’s arguments were – in contrast to those of the scholastic – not meant to illuminate by themselves. To see their force, one needed to love. Unlike the scholastic, who did not need to appeal to love in order that the force of the argument might be clear, the monastic theologian had constantly to recall to mind Bernard of Clairvaux’s observation that ‘only holiness and not debates can bring comprehension’ (De Consid, V, xiv:805).

But the general approach of the two ways of doing theology was very different and the central epistemological role given to love by the monks in
contrast to the central epistemological role given to logical analysis by the dialecticians would in the end lead to very different theologies. For all practical purposes monastic theology disappeared from the scene in the thirteenth century, yielding to the new scholastic form of theology that was to dominate western Christendom up to the time of the Reformation. Its heart – the importance of experiencing God and the epistemological role of love – continued to beat in the mystical movements of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. This would be its major home, where it would be rather isolated from the mainstream of theological discussion. Nevertheless, it would find a niche in mainstream theology and that niche would be in discussions on wisdom as a gift of the Spirit. For it will be there that the idea of a knowledge of God gained through unity with God in love will be found.
New emphasis: the role of reason and the beginnings of scholastic theology (eleventh to twelfth centuries)

4.1 General comments

Although a positive attitude to reason in theology was part of the patristic heritage bequeathed to the medieval church, for a variety of reasons it became submerged to a large extent. As we have seen, the early medieval period saw theology's main function as being simply to preserve and comment on the scriptures and patristic writings handed down to it. All the stress came to fall on the revelation contained in those writings, particularly in the scriptures. Theology was all about God's revelation and to the early medievals reason appeared to have little role to play in studying it. After all, it is God's word that illuminates the human mind — and not the other way around.

Moreover, with the breakdown of the school system following on the breakdown of the Roman Empire, the only centres of education were the monasteries. And there all the stress fell on the mystical unity with God that each individual monk sought to experience. Hence, meditation on the
scriptures (and writings of the Fathers) was stressed so that the Word itself would speak to them.

However, the eleventh century witnessed a resurgence of the use of logical analysis in probing that Word. The secular discipline used for making such an analysis was dialectics. Dialectics was the art of clear and logical thinking, enabling one to prove or disprove something. Whereas grammar examined the ways in which words and sentences operated in a text, dialectics focused on the logical interrelationship of ideas, whether embedded in a text or not. Grammar was linked to the study of a text, dialectics to the probing of ideas.

We saw earlier on how even the use of a tool like grammar was frowned on by some. However, while grammar evoked only a relatively minor protest, dialectics called forth all the wrath of the traditionalists, the monastic theologians of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The reason for such wrath should be clear after all that we have seen about monastic theology. In the eyes of the traditionalists, using dialectics when studying the faith that the Church proclaimed and practised could only too easily lead to the subjection of God's Word to the demands of human logic. And this was to invert the right order of things. The traditionalists held fast to the Augustinian doctrine that it was heavenly realities that illuminated earthly ones — and not the other way around.

What triggered off the renewed interest in the use of dialectics as an analytical tool was the burgeoning of canonical studies caused by the struggle between Church and State known as the 'Investiture Controversy'. Such studies involved examining earlier legislation, the 'canons' governing the issues that were at stake. The lists of past authorities that had been drawn up did not always resolve those issues, since the authorities themselves often enough appeared to conflict with each other. Mere textual analysis, therefore, was insufficient. What was necessary was to probe the ideas involved in the issues. And the tool that they naturally turned to was the one that best equipped a medieval thinker for such a task: dialectics.

In those days canonical issues were less clearly distinct from theological issues than they are today. It is not surprising, then, that the atmosphere of debate and the use of dialectics should spill over into the theological arena. When it did so it provoked a debate over the validity of its use that ranged over the whole of Europe (Ghellinck 1948:69–70). This is why the eleventh century has been described by historians of theology as the century of the
debate between the dialecticians and the anti-dialecticians. The dialecticians defended, with varying degrees of vehemence, the legitimacy of the use of reason in theology, especially in the form of dialectics. The anti-dialecticians saw it as an intrusion into a sphere where it did not belong. The faith, they argued, is something to be accepted in humility and lived, not dissected and discussed by man’s pride-filled reason. The dialecticians insisted that reason was essential to understanding the faith. Their opponents insisted that the faith’s transcendence precluded any such thing. What made matters worse was that in the eleventh century the liberal arts, especially dialectics, began to be studied for their own sakes once again — and not simply as a preparation for theological studies (as in the Carolingian renaissance). In other words, these arts were beginning to be studied once again as secular sciences that have their own rules and their own value apart from theology. In such a climate the use of dialectics can appear far more alien and threatening to theology than it would otherwise have been. The servant is asserting its independence!

Let us now examine the way in which three thinkers used dialectics and the difficulties they faced as a result.

4.2 Berengar (999—1088)

In the eleventh century, the person who symbolised more than anyone else the dangers of overconfidence in the use of dialectics was Berengar (999–1088). He utilised dialectical techniques to analyse the by-then traditional doctrine that bread and wine are really and truly changed into the body and blood of Christ and therefore of the doctrine that Christ is really and truly present in the Eucharist. His conclusion was that the statement that bread and wine become the true body and blood of Christ cannot be literally true but only symbolically. A logical analysis of the statement leads, he argued, to the conclusion that it means simply this: the bread and wine symbolise Christ’s body and blood. This conclusion contradicted what by then was held to be a virtually non-negotiable element of the Christian faith. Not surprisingly, his views caused an uproar.

Precisely what Berengar taught is a matter of some dispute. But what is undeniable and is of interest to us is the important role he gave to dialectics and the controversy aroused by his application of dialectical analysis to the doctrine of the Eucharist. Berengar’s opponents believed he had paid too much
respect to dialectics as a discipline in its own right. Instead of making it a
servant of theology, he appeared to them to make it its master. They had
grounds for their criticism. For Berengar had argued that theological asser­
tions must pass the test of analysis by means of dialectics. ‘It is most desirable,’
he said, ‘that in all things one has recourse to dialectics, because to do so is to
have recourse to reason’ (De sacra coena:101).

This is often quoted to prove Berengar’s excessive reliance on dialectics and
therefore that he inverted the true relationship between faith and reason. However, not so often quoted is the theological justification he gives for this,
a justification that removes him from the sphere of out-and-out rationalists.
It is also one that will be taken up again and again by those who justify a
balanced use of reason (dialectics) in theology. Berengar’s justification is as
follows: ‘since it is by virtue of the faculty of reason that a person is made in
the image of God, one who does not have recourse to reason ... cannot be re­
formed daily by it into the image of God’ (De sacra coena:101). Moreover,
Berengar did not by any means reject out of hand authority, represented here
by authoritative testimonies to the true understanding of the faith. He was
accused of doing so but his response was that such an accusation was false,
since he used authority wherever necessary (De sacra coena: 100).

Nevertheless, in the eyes of many Berengar committed the cardinal theolo­
gical sin: namely allowing reason to correct the faith rather than elucidate it.
Moreover, to speak of using authority ‘wherever necessary’ seemed to sound
too much like making it the final court of appeal – and in matters of faith,
authority, the authority of God’s Word and of the God-given faith of the
Church, was the final court of appeal and not simply an initial one. Although
it could have a perfectly orthodox meaning, a statement such as the following
served only to prove his guilt in the eyes of his opponents: ‘to grasp the truth
by reason is incomparably superior’ to doing so by quoting authorities (De
sacra coena:100).

One cannot but have sympathy with a man who no doubt was acutely aware
that there is a major difference between the authority of God’s Word and the
authority of the patristic testimonies to and interpretations of it – and acutely
aware that these testimonies disagreed among themselves (see below). In such
circumstances one could hardly blame him for trying to call in the services of
a God-given faculty (reason) in a form that even the holy Augustine allowed.
For, as Berengar argued in his defence, Augustine proclaimed ‘dialectics to
be the art of arts, the discipline of disciplines, one that knew how to learn, knew how to teach' (*De sacra coena*:100). But one has to concede that he needed to have been more alive to the limitations of a tool such as dialectics, especially when applied to as complex a range of cognitive material as that which claims to speak of transcendent realities. While one can have sympathy for a man who saw more clearly than many of his contemporaries that the believer's statements of faith are not a privileged ghetto immune to rational inspection, one also has sympathy for those who instinctively felt that the issues he was analysing were not susceptible to the sort of unnuanced application of dialectical rules employed by him. When one looks at the arguments he actually used, one's sympathy for his opponents increases. In short, I suspect that part of the reaction against Berengar was an instinctive awareness of the complexity of religious statements, a complexity that demands more complex categories of analysis than those provided by medieval dialectics.

4.3 Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109)

That reason can be used in a more constructive and balanced way was made evident in the work of Anselm of Canterbury (for what follows cf Gaybba 1984:87ff).

Anselm is generally acknowledged to be the greatest theologian in the West between the times of Augustine and Aquinas. He was educated at the school at Bec run by Lanfranc, who was Berengar's opponent. Anselm always spoke of his debt to Lanfranc, but surpassed him in every way. Lanfranc eventually became the archbishop of Canterbury and, when he died, Anselm was appointed in his place. Anselm remained there until he died and is therefore known as 'Anselm of Canterbury'.

His significance for theology as a discipline lay in the way he united reason and faith. In this he was by no means an innovator. He was really carrying on the tradition started by Augustine. As Knowles put it, 'he resumed, almost unconsciously, and as if it had been scarcely interrupted, the theological task that had been abandoned soon after Augustine's death by the divines of the West' (Knowles 1962:100), doing this at a time when theology was going through the initial stages of a renewed growth. Moreover, that very renewed growth was being stimulated by the whole issue of the use of dialectics in
theology. The direction the growth would take would depend on the resolution of this issue. Anselm's approach, though not immediately influential, was the one that would become characteristic of scholastic theology. Hence it is with justice that Grabmann calls Anselm 'the true father of Scholasticism' (Grabmann 1909:259).

Even a cursory comparison of Anselm with the general direction taken by his predecessors shows his originality and creativity. As Grabmann points out (1909:261ff), though utterly steeped in the Fathers (above all Augustine, who is his guiding light) and scripture, he is no compiler. In his works he presumes the faith that is contained in the biblical and patristic sources and proceeds to analyse it in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of it. His Latin is of a purity virtually unknown in those days and, thanks to his education at Bec, crystal clear. Combined with all this is the sort of piety that makes him more than simply an intellectual successor to Augustine.

Anselm's guiding principle - also Augustinian - has become famous. It is fides quarens intellectum - faith seeking understanding. His favourite saying is the Augustinian credo, ut intelligam - I believe in order to understand. Anselm's starting point, then, is faith - the faith that has been handed down to him. Found in scripture, proclaimed authoritatively by the Church, that faith is not to be questioned, but accepted (Tractatus de concordia:S2S). He immediately distances himself therefore from all those who would use dialectics to question what the Church believes.

This stress on 'faith' led some (cf Grabmann 1909:276) to believe that for Anselm faith is a prerequisite for any form of human knowledge whatsoever. Such an interpretation could find some support in that whereas Anselm repeatedly insists that he believes in order to understand, he does not mention the second half of the full Augustinian vision: intellige ut credas - understand, in order to believe. However, this interpretation of Anselm forgets that his whole interest was simply in understanding his faith - and not in outlining a general epistemology. Indeed, while displaying remarkable philosophical talents, Anselm displays no interest in philosophy as such. Anselm's starting point is the faith of Christians. However, it is his starting point in the sense that he is quite emphatic that one can and should attempt to understand that faith, using to the fullest extent all that reason can offer.

Reason plays a triple role in Anselm's theology (cf Grabmann 1909:336). First
of all, it strives to gain a rational insight into the faith. In other words, it tries to see the reasons that what we believe to be so is indeed so. This involves the use of analogy, the widespread use of dialectics and — and here he really stands head and shoulders above his predecessors — metaphysical analysis.

Second, reason plays a systematising role. It seeks to interlock, to relate one element to another, so that the organic unity of the faith is revealed.

Third, reason played an important role in solving problems: replying to objections, eliminating apparent contradictions. The best example of this is in one of his last works, the Tractatus de concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis necnon gratiae Dei cum libero arbitrio ("Treatise on reconciling God's foreknowledge, predestining and grace, with free will"). We have here in outline the approach to a theological issue that will become typical of Scholasticism: one first develops the arguments for and against a particular standpoint; this is followed by giving one's own views on the issue; finally, one is then in a position to answer the objections raised at the beginning.

Anselm's free and liberal use of rational arguments in his theology has led to accusations that he was a rationalist. He certainly gives the impression now and then that he is quite confident that reason can penetrate all God's mysteries. However, to view him as a rationalist is to ignore the role that faith continues to play in his thinking. Anselm was always trying to understand a truth whose existence he presupposed. He was not trying to prove the truth in question, or deduce it from pure reason, even though his attempts to understand the inner rationale of a particular belief at times give such an impression.

Nevertheless, the rationalist strain is there, though kept in check by his intense faith and, in particular, his deep spirituality. It is not surprising then that Anselm's influence would only really be felt when the debate over the usefulness of reason was virtually settled — as it was by the end of the twelfth century. As Ghellinck 1948:83 points out, during the period immediately following his death, 'neither his treatises, nor his doctrines, nor his way of theologising seems to have entered straightaway into the schools. He is rarely quoted, apart from Abelard, who refers to him three times, or later John of Cornwall and some others.' However, from the thirteenth century onwards his contributions to theology came to be recognised and would remain so ever afterwards.
Mention of Abelard brings us to the dominant theological figure of the twelfth century. As will be seen, Abelard more than any other single theologian was to lay the foundations for changing the shape of what is today known as systematic theology. However, our interest in him at this point resides in his passionate defence of the use of reason, in the form of dialectics, in theology. He too will engender strong opposition from the more traditionalist minded theologians. Indeed, in the fight between Abelard, on the one hand, and Bernard of Clairvaux and William of St Thierry, on the other hand, we witness the final battle between the dialecticians and anti-dialecticians. The dialecticians will be the victors, albeit due in large measure to the more balanced voices that arose in both the eleventh (as in Anselm) and the twelfth (as in Hugh of St Victor) centuries.

To return to Abelard (or, as it is more correctly spelt, Abailard), he began his intellectual life not as a theologian but as a philosopher, having studied under two men whose views on the raging philosophical issue of the day — the nature and status of concepts known as ‘universals’ — he would later attack in his typically scornful fashion: Roscelin and William of Champeaux (for what follows cf Gaybba 1984:117ff). In the fashion of the time he would set up schools wherever suitable — at Melun, Corbeil, and finally in Paris. It was there that he decided to become a theologian. He therefore went to study under the most renowned of the teachers of the day, Anselm of Laon (a pupil of Anselm of Canterbury). He soon decided — again in typical Abelardian fashion — to set up his own school (of theology) at Laon. His first lecture was a foretaste of what sort of a theologian he would be: it was an exegesis of Ezekiel done with the aid of the knowledge of the logical structure of language that he had mastered from his philosophical days. This was a break from the traditional dependence on commentaries. In Abelard’s own prejudiced account of the incident (Historia Calamitatum:125) he was a brilliant success, thereby proving the point he had made and which had led to him being challenged to produce such an exegesis: one does not need extensive commentaries if one has mastered dialectics!

He returned to Paris, gathering, as always happened with him, large numbers of students. These students, he said, wanted reasons that were logical and which made sense to them (Historia Calamitatum:141–142). One of his pupils was Heloise. The two fell violently in love, had an affair, and a son. Since he
was neither in major orders nor a monk at the time, Abelard was free to marry. However, this would have blocked his career as a theologian. They therefore married secretly. Disaster followed. Heloise’s uncle plotted and brought about a physical assault on Abelard in which he was castrated. Abelard decided to become a monk and pressurised the heroically loyal Heloise to become a nun. The names of Abelard and Heloise have been inextricably linked ever since, ensuring yet another distinction for Abelard—he is the only theologian to have attained the mythological ranks of the great lovers.

His life now revolved around his career as a theologian, even though it had many stormy episodes. He seemed unable to get on with his fellow monks and was the object of repeated attacks because of his use of dialectics. In particular, his writings on the Trinity were condemned. However, he never broke with the Church, and his last year was such an exemplary one of humility and self-discipline that even Peter the Venerable was impressed.

Abelard was a brilliant dialectician and has earned a justifiable place not only in the history of theology but also in the medieval development of logical theory. When one takes full cognisance of the extent of his talents in this field, his mercurial temperament, the opposition, often obscurantist, against the use of a discipline—dialectics—brought into disrepute by Berengar and Roscelin, one can understand and forgive the passion with which he defends his use of the secular arts in theology, especially dialectics—and even why he sees dialectics as a divine gift and not just an acquired art!

To justify the use of dialectics in theology, he appeals to three factors.

His first appeal is one that recalls the earliest use of philosophy by Christian thinkers: the defence of Christian beliefs against attacks made on philosophical grounds (Introductio ad theologiam: 1040). His second appeal is that all the arts and their insights are part of God’s good creation and can therefore be used in his service (ibid). The idea is expanded in one of his letters in a manner reminiscent of the positive evaluation of pagan philosophy found in the early Greek Fathers. Abelard points out that the very word ‘logic’ comes from the Greek ‘logos’ and that this same word is used by John for Christ. Its application to Christ indicates that the science that takes its name from it (‘logic’) belongs first and foremost to Christ. Moreover, he argues, one sees Christ using it when he confounded his critics. Christ promised to share this gift of his with his disciples when he said: ‘I will give you a wisdom that your
adversaries will be unable to resist’ (Lk 21:15). By taking on our nature, Christ therefore makes us not only Christians but also true philosophers (Ep 13:355–356). It is a fascinating theological argument for the full and free use of reason in theology. Abelard’s third appeal is to something that he justifiably felt his conservative opponents should accept: tradition! And his star witness is, of course, the one Berengar appealed to, namely Augustine, who clearly saw the use of philosophy in the service of theology as not only justifiable but desirable.

However, for all his impassioned defence and brilliant use of dialectics in theology, it would be a mistake to regard him, as so many have done, as being simply a rationalist. Wrong too is the related judgement that would see him as ‘the leader of free thought and rationalism against the obscurantism and intolerance of St Bernard’ (cf Knowles 1962:116). To appreciate Abelard’s true view of the role of dialectics one has to take seriously his strictures against those who used it simply to show off, to dazzle with their display of dialectical skill, and who acted as though there was nothing that could not be grasped and defended by means of dialectics (see his Theologia Christiana:1212, & 1218).

Abelard certainly does not wish to see dialectics being the master of theology. Grabmann demonstrates this with his customary thoroughness in an analysis of the way in which Abelard saw the relationship between faith and reason (Grabmann 1911:188ff). The mark of the rationalist is that reason is the final court of appeal in matters theological, that only those things are worthy of acceptance that reason can dissect analytically and of which it can demonstrate the cogency. However, for all his love of dialectics, Abelard remains fundamentally the believer. His comment to Heloise that he would rather abandon philosophy than conflict with Paul or be cut off from Christ (Ep 17:375) was not simply empty rhetoric on his part. Abelard is quite explicit that reason cannot prove the Trinity or the procession of the Spirit. It can only appeal to arguments of convenience to show that it is ‘close to human reason’ – that is (as I read him) it is not unreasonable. Moreover, he distinguishes quite clearly between (a) belief, (b) the sort of understanding of it that reason can aid us in, and (c) the sort of comprehension that lays the inner rationale of a reality bare (Introductio ad theologiam:1050–1051). The rationalist seeks the latter of the two types of understanding, (c). Abelard, however, is attempting the former, (b). Third, Abelard acknowledges and stresses that the mysteries of the faith transcend the intellect’s capacities.
Reason has its limitations even in the natural order. It is even more limited, then, when confronted with such mysteries. This is particularly true of the transcendent nature of God (*Theologia Christiana*:1222ff, 1242). Fourth, Abelard as a result stresses that the concepts philosophy uses cannot be applied straightforwardly to the divine (*Theologia Christiana*:1247). Finally, and perhaps most important of all, he clearly regards the authority of the faith as the foundation of subsequent theological activity. He agrees that, particularly in matters theological, 'it is safer to follow authority than human judgement'. The break with Berengar at this point is clear. Instead, he explicitly links up with Anselm's procedure by stating that in his *Introduction to theology* he will give first of all the authoritative foundations for what follows and then, added to these as a support, arguments from reason (*Introductio ad theologiam*:1039). As can be seen, Abelard was not simply defending himself but was dealing explicitly with some fundamental issues of theological method, involving the use of reason. His solutions are still subscribed to by many today.

However, while Abelard was not a rationalist, those of his contemporaries who felt he had gone too far in that direction had – like Berengar – genuine grounds for complaint. That his forays into trinitarian and incarnational theology led to some heterodox statements did not help his cause. Nor did his temperament help matters. It was one that only too easily appeared to many people to be excessively puffed up with its own self-confidence and insufficiently humble before God's Word.

What is clear, however, is that Abelard became more clearly orthodox as the years passed by (Knowles 1962:124). He had an immense following – one can talk of a true 'school' of Abelard – and among his pupils are to be found several famous names, including a future pope (Roland Bandinelli – Alexander III) and, quite possibly, Peter Lombard, through whom Abelard's *Sic et non* will influence the entire structure of future theological work. We must look at that influence shortly. But first let us examine the related process whereby theology came to be an academic discipline.
Becoming an academic discipline (twelfth to thirteenth centuries)

5.1 The rise of universities

Unquestionably the intellectual developments of this period owe more to the events constituting the rise of the universities (cf Gaybba 1984, chapter 10 for much of what follows and for further references, especially to a core work, Evans 1980) than to any other single factor. At the end of the eleventh century there were four kinds of schools in Europe: the cathedral schools; the monastic schools; the — for want of a better word — personal schools; and, in Italy, the liberal arts schools (cf Evans 1980:8–9). The liberal arts schools were confined to Italy and had little influence on the development of the universities further north. The third type — the personal schools — lacked any form of institutionalisation. They consisted simply of a famous teacher and whatever pupils came to hear him. Any teacher could set up such a school (as Abelard did several times), the existence of which could be very short-lived.

The most common was the second type — the monastic schools. They had a certain stability since they were attached to particular monasteries. The tuition was generally competent, with every now and then a particular school achieving eminence because of an outstanding individual (for example the school of Bec — here Anselm was educated — under Lanfranc). However, the
tuition was aimed mainly at teaching monks what they needed to know to be good monks. The aim was not to provide all-round tuition. Originally, such schools did take outside pupils, but this ceased in the twelfth century. Thereafter the monastic schools regressed to being mostly centres of study aimed at improving the monks’ personal piety. Unlike the cathedral schools, ‘there was no steady development of a syllabus of study, no examination leading to the award of a degree’ (Evans 1980:8).

It was in the cathedral schools, then, that the major developments occurred. Situated as they were in cities, they attracted not only students who wished to improve their theological learning but also those who wished to steep themselves in what the secular sciences had to offer. In the twelfth century these schools attracted not only an increasing number of students, but also a diversity of teachers.

It is not difficult to see how the pupils who came to hear one master lecture might draw other masters after them, masters who came in the hope of attracting some pupils to themselves. Slowly an aggregation of masters in certain schools made it less likely that the departure or death of one of them would bring an end to the school’s period of prosperity. In this way a school came to amount to something more than a meeting of master and pupils; it became a meeting-place. Long before it became impossible for someone to set up his own school at will (as it did in the thirteenth century) it became unusual for him to do so (Evans 1980:11).

These conglomerations of students and masters from all over the Western world were the nucleus from which universities would originate. Hence a university was originally called a studium generale ‘where studium denotes “facilities for study” or organized school, and generale has reference, not to the subjects taught, but to the provenance of the students, as we might say “of general resort” or “international”’(Knowles 1962:153). The actual word universitas was originally used to mean ‘the whole group (of students or masters or both);’ Later it came to mean their ‘trade unions’ (as we would put it – in those days such organisations were called ‘guilds’). Only much later did the word come to refer to the universal scope of studies offered – that is, studies in all fields.

The two original universities were those at Bologna (in Italy) and Paris, Bologna being the first one. However, it is the university of Paris that influenced the subsequent style not only of universities in Northern Europe but also of
theology. The final step towards the formation of Paris as a university took place sometime between 1150 and 1170. This step was taken when the teachers decided to form one single institution. This institution would grant degrees (the concept of degrees originated from the licences to teach that had already been granted for some time by cathedral schools to their successful applicants). And it would have four faculties: theology, canon law, medicine and arts. The University of Paris became medieval Europe's most famous centre of learning, becoming a model for virtually all others.

Let us now see how all this influenced the teaching of theology.

Briefly, the movement to form universities brought about a structured programme of studies that all students had to go through. Gone were the days when masters and students could arrange their own course of studies entirely as they wished. Instead, clear syllabi, prescribed texts, mandatory exercises and examinations now appeared. Theology thereby became a distinct subject in which an individual could only be declared proficient after having passed through a defined course of instruction and performed satisfactorily in an examination.

This standardisation obviously raised the general level of theological learning in Europe. It also created a common pool of theological knowledge that could be taken as given. This then freed those who had mastered it to focus on specific points of debate or problematic areas in theology, and this in turn advanced theological learning at a more rapid rate than hitherto. All of this was assisted by the availability of new resource material that occurred in the twelfth century.

5.2 The availability of new resource material

The availability of new resource material in the West was one of the effects of the crusades and the increasing trade between East and West. Greek and Arabic works unknown to the West were made available in translation. The new sources covered a wide area, ranging from classical pagan literature (which influenced neither the content nor the method of theology very much) (Grabmann 1911:59), through philosophical works, to Greek patristic writings hitherto unknown in the West (which did have a notable influence on scholasticism) (Grabmann 1911:81). However, two authors need to be mentioned explicitly.
The first is *Aristotle*. Although other philosophical sources (Platonic and neo-Platonic) were made available through translations at this time, it was the translation of the rest of Aristotle's logical works that had the greatest influence on the subsequent development of medieval theology. These works began to become known and used in the middle (Knowles 1962:185–190) of the twelfth century. They came to be known as the *logica nova* ('the new logic') to distinguish it from what was now called the *logica vetus* ('old logic'). The *logica vetus* comprised those dialectical works of Aristotle that were already known to the medievals (see above). It was, as the twelfth century discovered, only the first half of a much bigger work on logic, that is dialectics, called the *Organon*. The *logica nova* was the second half and comprised the *Prior analytics*, and the *Posterior analytics*, the *Topics* and the *Sophistical arguments*. Congar has referred to the *logica vetus* as Aristotle's first entry into medieval thought, and the discovery of the *logica nova* as his second entry. His third entry will be the thirteenth-century discovery of the rest of his philosophical works—his psychology, metaphysics, etc (although some of his psychological and metaphysical works were known and sporadically used towards the end of the twelfth century) (cf Congar 1968:59–60, 85).

The influence of these newly discovered dialectical works of Aristotle on the subsequent development of theology was enormous. As Knowles points out, dialectical logic became 'the be-all and end-all of the course in the liberal arts which so soon became the necessary preparation for all the higher studies in the nascent universities. In so doing, it canonised, for the whole of the Middle Ages and beyond, the question and disputation (see below) as the basic form of all teaching and discovery. These in turn rested upon the correct manipulation of the syllogism, and upon the critical technique of the "new" logic in demolishing false argument and pressing home valid demonstrations' (1962:190). Of course by 'whole of the Middle Ages' Knowles is referring to the rest of the Middle Ages (which have already run half their course). Up to the twelfth century the *lectio* was the only meaningful ingredient in teaching. After Aristotle's second entry the disputation of issues will become a prominent feature alongside it.

The second author to be mentioned specifically is the last of the Greek Fathers, John Damascene. In the middle of the twelfth century the third part of his *Fount of wisdom* was translated into Latin. It was called *De fide orthodoxa* ('On the Orthodox Faith'). As Grabmann points out (1911:93), in this way the scholasticism of the East (John Damascene was familiar with and used
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Aristotelian philosophy in his work) and that of the West came into contact with each other, with the East giving the West new material as well as new methodological insights.

As regards the new material, this was especially evident in twelfth-century trinitarian and Christological controversies, since Damascene had gathered together in his work all the previous Greek thinkers on the issues (he saw himself primarily as a compiler, since for him too theology was mainly a matter of preserving the insights of the past). As regards methodology, he provided medieval theologians with an impressive example of how Aristotelian dialectics can be used to illuminate theological issues. In particular he bequeathed to them an example of terminological precision in a field that, despite Tertullian, still needed it: the doctrine of God and the related one of the incarnation (Grabmann 1911:111–113).

5.3 The elements of an academic discipline

The rise of the universities and the development of theology as an academic discipline are closely connected. For, once it began to be taught as one subject among several, it needed to define its own identity in relation to them. It needed to work out where theology fitted into the general scheme of learning. But it particularly needed to specify its object of study and its methods.

As regards its object of study, this involved two things: finding theology a name of its own and clarifying what fell within its ambit. As regards its methods, for the twelfth century this amounted to working out its ‘rules’. Every discipline had its rules. So too must theology.

For most of the twelfth century there was, in the West, no single clear term for what we would today call theology — that is, a field of study ranging from the study of the biblical text to speculative analyses of points of doctrine (Evans 1980:30). Since it is difficult to discuss the nature of something clearly until you have a term that delimits the entity under discussion, the pressure to clarify theology’s field of study and ‘rules’ also led to the emergence, at the end of the twelfth and beginning of the thirteenth century, of ‘theology’ as a name for the infant academic discipline.

When exactly the term ‘theology’ (which was an old term and which was used to refer especially to what is today called the doctrine of God) came to be
used for the infant academic discipline is unclear. But we find it used in the first of half of the thirteenth century to describe the faculty in which theology was taught at the University of Paris: the Faculty of Theology. It also begins to be employed by writers in the sense of a discipline that has a clearly defined field of study (for example Aquinas' *Summa theologiae*, even though his favourite term for the discipline is the older one of *sacra doctrina* ('sacred doctrine'). But even before the term ‘theology’ came to be widely used, the field of study had come to be reasonably clearly delineated, especially from the time of Aquinas onwards.

As regards the field of study itself, already in the twelfth century three distinct branches of theology were emerging: biblical studies, speculative theology, apologetical theology (cf Evans 1980:40). The developing academic character of theology can also be seen in the various attempts made by twelfth-century theologians to relate these to each other in an orderly way, to impose on them a unifying scheme, that is, one that would clearly reflect the unity that enabled them all to fall under the one label of ‘theology’. As Evans remarks, ‘the need for organization ... marks the early development of an academic discipline’ (1980:40).

However, one final and – for the medievals – most important element had to be added, so that theology could be an academic discipline. This was a set of ‘rules’. According to medieval ideas, an academic discipline was one that could be taught according to a clearly defined set of rules (Evans 1980:28). These ‘rules’ were the basic presuppositions, axioms, maxims, etc, that guided the way in which a particular discipline was practised. It was felt that theology too, if it was to be regarded as an ‘ars’ (‘art’, what we today would call an ‘academic discipline’), had to be able to clarify its basic terms, presuppositions and axioms in such a way as to enable any intelligent person to understand and evaluate what is being said. While Gilbert of Poitiers (1076–1154) seems to have been the first to have drawn attention to the need for theology to clarify its basic ‘rules’, only two thinkers in the twelfth century seem to have made a major attempt to do so.

The first was Alan of Lille (died c 1202) and his attempt is to be found in his aptly entitled work *Regula de sacra theologia* (‘Rules for sacred theology’). In it he lays down rules for the correct use of words in theological matters, especially when speaking of God. He also clarifies certain basic axioms (for example ‘whatever is in God is God’). The second author was Nicholas of Amiens,
who wrote a work called *De arte catholicae fidei* (‘on the art [discipline] of the catholic faith’). What is particularly interesting about this work is that it is an early attempt to base theological method on a mathematical-deductive model. His work is divided into five books (God, creation, creatures, the incarnate Word, sacraments, resurrection). But all of this is prefaced with a section in which he gives a series of definitions of terms (for example ‘cause’, ‘substance’, ‘matter’, ‘form’), states his presuppositions (which will undergird the rest of the work), and gives seven axioms that he regards as self-evident. He then proceeds to compose each of the five books in such a way that it is made up of a chain of logically linked propositions.

As has been remarked by others, these early attempts to clarify theology’s presuppositions, axioms and procedural methods did not take sufficient account of the difference between theology and philosophy, between a faith-based discipline and one which bases itself on reason or natural experience. But the very fact that these attempts were made is indicative of theology’s transformation into an academic discipline. Let us now go on to see what else went into that transformation – namely, the shift from being mainly a commentary on a text to a probing of issues through logical debate.