6 | Giving theology a new shape (twelfth to thirteenth centuries)

6.1 The development and increasing importance of the 'quaestio'

As we saw, up to and including much of the twelfth century, theological activity was conceived of as reading and commenting on the scriptures and the Fathers. However, the twelfth century witnesses a change taking place – a shift from such commentary to the discussion of issues. This in turn assisted greatly the process of systematisation, focusing on creating a systematic exposition of all the themes, all the *issues*, that could be discussed in theology. We therefore begin our story by examining the increasing dominance of what was known as the *quaestio*, namely the 'question' or 'issue' in theological discussions.

Three factors in particular stimulated the development of the *quaestio* (see Gaybba 1984:130ff): the practice of interrupting the reading of the text to discuss a particular point; Peter Abelard's *Sic et non*; the 'second entry' of Aristotle (that is, the discovery of the rest of his *Organon*).

6.1.1 Interrupting the text to deal with an issue

The practice of interrupting the text being read in order to deal with a particular issue was an old one, going right back to patristic times. However, the

twelfth century saw a dramatic increase in the number of such questions being raised and dealt with. Until the time of Peter Abelard, such questions were still regarded as part of biblical commentary. But with the publication of his *Sic et non* a new form of theological literature appeared on the scene, one that concentrated entirely on debating issues. The issues arose precisely because the Fathers of the Church appeared to hold divergent opinions on them. This leads us to the next factor influencing the development of the *quaestio* – namely Abelard's *Sic et non*.

6.1.2 Abelard's *Sic et non*

We saw how the practice arose of making collections of patristic statements about a variety of issues (the collections came to be called 'Sentences', as was seen).We also saw that the practice of putting alongside each other statements by a variety of Fathers on a particular theme served to highlight that, judged simply by their words, the Fathers disagreed with each other. Attempts at reconciliation can be traced to as far back as the seventh century. In the ninth century Hincmar of Rheims and then in the eleventh century Bernold of Constance provided a list of criteria for resolving the apparent contradictions: for example consult the context of the text, compare it with other texts, and check its authenticity. However, these attempts were made principally by canonists – those versed in canon law – in order to deal with canonical disputes. Peter Abelard would build on Bernold's work by using his criteria to probe strictly theological issues. This he did in his *Sic et non*.

As its title indicates, ('Sic et non' means 'Yes and no') the work is devoted to probing apparent contradictions, in this case contradictory patristic statements. However, Abelard's purpose is not to discredit the Fathers but to stimulate young theological students to think. As he says in his Prologue, 'the first key to wisdom is constant and frequent questioning', and he gives a biblical justification for this by quoting Matthew 7:7: 'Seek and you shall find!' (*Sic et non*:1349). Questioning for Abelard is absolutely central to theology – and therein lay his contribution to it.

In the Prologue to this work he gives five rules for reconciling contradictory texts, rules which he obtained from Bernold of Constance: (1) check the authenticity of the text; (2) check with the author's other, especially later, writings, so as to see whether or not the problematic text represents a view-

point once held but then retracted; (3) check the binding character of con-
flicting laws; (4) search for different shades of meaning in the words used; (5)
if the previous rules did not resolve the contradiction, then establish which
of the conflicting viewpoints has the greater authority supporting it, and opt
for that.

Having given the guidelines for resolving such contradictions, he then
proceeds to list opposing patristic authorities on 158 issues, beginning with
the widely debated one of the relationship between faith and reason: 'that
faith should be supported by reasoning – and that it should not'. All the
questions are posed in the form: 'that x is so; that x is not so'. Moreover,
Abelard craftily selected texts in which only one of the above rules would
normally be invoked, namely the fourth rule, which forced the students to
probe the concepts behind the words used and in that way argue out the issue
for themselves (cf Grabmann 1911:211–212). For he himself did not resolve the
issues in his book, leaving them as a challenge to his students. This forced the
students to use dialectics as their major tool. It had the danger of leading to
hairsplitting about the meaning of words. But it had the enormous ad-
vantage of forcing people to think through the opposing arguments for an
issue. When the rest of Aristotle's logic became available, then the issues
would be debated with greater logical precision. This brings us to the third of
the factors stimulating the rise of the *quaestio*: the discovery of Aristotle's *logica
nova*.

6.1.3 The discovery of Aristotle's *logica nova*

Abelard knew only that part of Aristotle's logical writings known as the 'old
logic' when he wrote his *Sic et non*. However, between 1120 and 1160 the re-
mainder of Aristotle's *Organon* was disseminated in translations in the West. In
it the West discovered a theory of syllogistic reasoning and the principles of
scientific demonstration.

This was to influence decisively the form that the *quaestio* eventually took. The
Sic et non method had already begun the process of casting the *quaestio* in the
form of a thesis and its antithesis. The newly discovered work of Aristotle led
to an expansion of this form, so that the *quaestio* came to take on the following
structure as its normal one: thesis; arguments for; arguments against; the
master's own viewpoint; responses to the arguments.

Crucial to this development were the rules of syllogistic reasoning. These rules were exercised in what was called the scholastic 'disputation'. The further development of the *quaestio* was therefore influenced by the dominant role that the disputation came to play in the infant universities.

Of course, the art of disputing issues and the use of the disputation as a learning tool was not exclusively a twelfth-century phenomenon. We find it in patristic times and also in several tenth- and eleventh-century schools (Grabmann 1911:16–17). However, in the newly discovered part of the *Organon*, Aristotle had laid down the logical rules to be observed in conducting a disputation. Mastering those rules and putting them into practice became part of every theological student's education.

In a disputation, one party would propound a thesis and argue briefly in its defence. An opponent would then reject the thesis and provide counter-arguments. The defender would then have to defend his arguments, usually by means of distinctions. He may say something like this: as regards your objections, if you mean x, I agree, but if you mean y, I disagree, for x and y must be distinguished because of p, q, r. And so the battle would rage back and forth. When students disputed a thesis during a lesson, the practice arose of the lesson ending with the master giving his resolution of the problem being debated.

The effect of this on the development of the *quaestio* was that it ceased to be a simple unstructured discussion of a particular point, but a logical arguing of it according to clear rules. A thesis would be stated, briefly explained, and a brief argument given in its defence. Then arguments for rejecting the thesis would be presented. The problematic character of the issue having now been made clear, a solution would then be offered, together with answers to each of the objections. The fruits of this development can be seen by opening any page of medieval theology's most famous work: Thomas Aquinas's *Summa theologiae*.

The *quaestio* had, then, its roots far back in history and entered theological method through Abelard's *Sic et non*. From there it would spread through the influence of Lombard's *Sentences* (see following section), a work which was constructed around a series of systematically arranged *quaestiones*. Opposition occurred. This was predictable, because the process involved a move away from simply studying the writings of the Fathers and the scriptures. But the *quaestio* triumphed in the end (cf Congar 1968:84).

6.2 Systematisation of theological issues

Closely linked to the development of the *quaestio* was a strong twelfth-century drive towards systematising theological issues, and the rise of the *summae*, as they were called (see Gaybba 1984:138ff).

Of course, as with so much else that we have seen, systematisation too was not a twelfth-century invention – even systematization in matters theological. As early as the third century, Origen and Tertullian were not only arranging their theological data systematically, but they also sought to weld such data into a system (Origen) or to elucidate the system believed to be inherent in the faith (Tertullian). Furthermore, in the seventh century Isidore of Seville's *Libri tres sententiarum* was a work in which the material was systematically arranged around doctrinal themes. There are other works that could also be mentioned.

However, it was only in the twelfth century that a strong, widespread, and conscious move towards systematisation took place and did so in two senses. First of all, it did so in the sense of arranging data according to a clear plan. Secondly, and more importantly, it did so in the sense of bringing out the connection between the various doctrines so as to present them as part of an organic whole. It is with this latter drive that systematic theology was truly born.

The reasons for this taking place in the twelfth century should be clear by now. First of all, it was a period of systematically organised theological activity unparalleled in the history of the Church. Second, since systematisation is an intrinsic element in any true discipline, theology's development as an academic subject entailed a drive towards the systematisation (in both the above senses) of its data. Third, during the days when mere commentary reigned supreme, the order of treatment was dictated by the text being commented upon. One followed the outline of the text rather than a more logical arrangement of material. The increasing dominance of the *quaestio* provided the freedom for a more logically systematised arrangement of issues. Many of the questions that originated during textual commentary were later gathered together and arranged into a systematic order. Fourth, the development of the *quaestio* also involved the analysis of particular issues. The result was that data were not only systematically arranged, but also

analysed so that the logical relationship between the various issues was laid
bare – thereby creating a true system, an organic unity.

The beginnings of the twelfth-century's drive towards systematisation are to
be found in the collections of Sentences emanating from two schools: Laon
and St Victor (Grabmann 1911:157–168; Ghellinck 1948:133–148). Both be-
came famous for their learning, and it has been said that either or both of
these schools played a role in the formation of just about every twelfth-cen-
tury theologian of note. But other works systematising theological issues
also began to appear, such as Abelard's *Introductio ad theologiam* ('Introduction to
theology') and Hugh of St Victor's outstanding work *De sacramentis christianae
fidei* ('The sacraments of the Christian faith') – in which the entire spectrum
of Christian belief is covered (he is using the word 'sacrament' here in the
broad sense of 'the mysteries of the Christian faith'). However, neither of
these nor many other similar works were destined to have the sort of influ-
ence on subsequent theology that Peter Lombard's *Libri quattuor sententiarum* –
'The four books of sentences' – would have. We must now examine briefly
that historic work.

6.3 Peter Lombard's 'Sentences'

Born in Lombardy (hence his 'surname') at the turn of the century, Peter
Lombard studied at Bologna, Rheims, in the school of St Victor and, prob-
ably, under Abelard. From 1140 he taught at the cathedral school of Paris. In
1159 he became the city's bishop and died two years later.

His fame rests on his *Four books of sentences*, composed some time between 1150
and 1158, according to the prologue of the Grottaferrata critical edition of
this work. Lombard's *Sentences* cover the entire spectrum of Christian beliefs.
Divided into four large books, the first deals with God – one and triune; the
second with creation, grace, original and personal sin; the third with
Christology and soteriology, the virtues and the ten commandments; and the
fourth with the sacraments and eschatology.

The work is clearly systematic in the sense that the material is arranged in a
logical order. However, it lacks the systematic strength of Hugh of St Victor's
great work. It has, for example, been criticised for having no clear, con-
sistently followed, unifying idea or ideas. But it was a good middle-of-the-
road work, one that managed to take the best of the two traditions that were

beginning to diverge so strongly in the twelfth century: the more monastic orientation of Hugh of St Victor and the more progressive, questioning approach of an Abelard. Lombard's work breathes the spirit of humility and respect for the truth and for the Fathers which is typical of monastic theology. But it also breathes the spirit of the *Sic et non*. For it is Abelard's *Sic et non* that gave Peter Lombard his basic technique: the setting down of opposing viewpoints as the beginning of the investigation of an issue. Moreover, he goes further than Abelard, since he not only gives the opposing views but actually attempts to resolve the issues raised by them. In doing so he does not hesitate to use dialectics and his grasp of syllogistic reasoning betrays the influence of the newly discovered works of Aristotle. Indeed, the Abelardian aspects of his work were to earn for him opposition from several quarters and even a papal condemnation for some doctrinal stances taken. Nevertheless, the work's merits were sufficient to overcome these setbacks and it was destined to play a major role in establishing a form of theology in which every issue undergoes the test of a series of searching questions.

In addition to its balance, embracing the best of the old and the new, the *Sentences* also had two other qualities that would contribute to its universal and long-lasting appeal: it was a mine of information about the ideas and issues being debated in the author's day; it was not wedded to any particular philosophical system. The work breathes the Augustinian air of its times but is not committed to Platonism for its intellectual framework in the way that Aquinas would be to Aristotelianism. Finally, personal factors also contributed to its rapid diffusion and universal acceptance. That he became bishop of Paris may have helped focus attention on his work but a more important influence seems to have been exercised by his student, Peter of Poitiers, who used his position as chancellor of the schools in Paris to impress the merits of the *Sentences* on the theologians there as the twelfth moved into the thirteenth century.

In 1222 Alexander of Hales made what was to become one of the most momentous decisions in the history of theology as a discipline: he introduced the *Sentences* as the manual of theology for his course in Paris. What was significant about that action was that it introduced into theology a textbook other than the Bible. Of course other works were always available to students. But Alexander's action rapidly led to the situation where the two basic texts that every student had to master were the Bible and the *Sentences*. The authority that the *Sentences* had as a result of this action is difficult for us to imagine

today, since we take for granted a situation where theological texts other than
the Bible form a major part of theological studies. Indeed, it was Alexander's
action that eventually led to a reassessment of theology's specific body of
knowledge, as we will see later on.

The *Sentences* was to become the most influential theological book in medie-
val times. Indeed, one could perhaps say that it became the most influential
book in the whole history of theology, influencing the views on the re-
lationship between the various parts of theology of untold generations of
students. 'No book save the Bible was copied and commented upon so often
between 1150 and 1500' (Knowles 1962:182). Peter Lombard was called 'The
Master of the Sentences' and his book rapidly became the standard theolo-
gical textbook in all the universities. After completing his biblical studies,
the theological student then had to study Lombard's work, after which he
became a 'Bachelor of the Sentences'. He was introduced to Lombard's work
by means of commentaries. Most of the commentaries on the *Sentences* pre-
served in manuscripts were the product of a bachelor's studies (Glorieux
1967:95). Many were published after the author qualified as a master of
theology. As a result, commentaries on the *Sentences* became one of the most
striking features of theological life for centuries. The custom of writing such
commentaries continued in at least some centres to as late as the mid-se-
venteenth century. As you can imagine, the commentaries that grew up
around Lombard's work were legion and have become the major source for
any research into theological thought from the thirteenth to the fifteenth
centuries.

6.4 The use of secular knowledge in theology

We saw above how the use of dialectics led to passionate opposition to the
sort of role that was now being accorded to reason. These fights were about
reason as a *tool*, that is to say, about using it as a technique for analysing
something. They were fights about the extent to which logic could be applied
to divine truths. That fight was largely won by the time the thirteenth cen-
tury got under way. The next issue would be using reason not just as a tool but
as a source of knowledge, namely using secular knowledge as a framework
for illuminating the faith. We see this happening at the turn of the twelfth and
thirteenth centuries when theologians started using Aristotelian psychology
to understand the structure of the soul and the way the human mind worked.

This was relevant to their discussions about the way in which God worked within the souls of believers and believers responded to God's grace. From such beginnings there developed that widespread use of secular sources that we see occurring in Thomas Aquinas (mid-thirteenth century). By that stage all of Aristotle's works had been discovered by the West and the result was a body of literature that covered virtually all the known fields of knowledge. This massive entry of an alien secular body of knowledge into a Christian culture which had forgotten how influenced it had been centuries earlier by Platonic thought created a near-crisis in the young theological faculty of Paris. The challenge presented by the presence of such a body of knowledge was in its own day as threatening, if not more so, as Galileo and Darwin would be in their days. Aquinas's genius was that he took Aristotle's philosophy by the scruff of its neck and baptised it. Not all appreciated it at the time and one could still argue that the baptism was not all that successful. But one cannot ignore the immensity of what he did achieve.

After Aquinas, it became common practice to utilise secular knowledge in theology. This was viewed in different ways by different theologians. Some saw the result as meriting the name 'theology', others did not. But the practice was widespread nevertheless. As a result, a theory of theology as a science (taking science in a broad sense) of 'conclusions' developed. The background to this was the role that syllogistic reasoning (the science of logical argumentation) had come to play in theology. A syllogism was a form of logical argumentation whereby a conclusion was drawn from two premises (to give a text-book example, premise 1: 'all human beings are mortal'; premise 2: 'but this is a human being'; conclusion: 'therefore this is mortal'). Theology came to be seen as a science that widened one's knowledge (of God, etc) by drawing conclusions from premises. Both premises may be taken from what were seen as the sources of revelation (scripture, but also the Church's traditional beliefs). Or one may be taken from revelation and another from secular sources. We will look at this in a bit more detail later on. Suffice it to say that the use these medievals made of such secular knowledge not only echoed the earlier uses made by the Apologists of Stoic ideas or the uses made by Augustine and Origen of neo-Platonist ideas (though more subconsciously than consciously) but also presaged the widespread use of secular knowledge that is found in theological circles today.

6.5 The rise of 'scholastic theology'

What we are witnessing is the rise of what has come to be called 'scholastic theology'. The name 'scholastic' means 'of the schools' and refers to the fact that this type of theology grew out of the cathedral schools in which secular learning was revived and which led to the establishment of universities. As such, this type of theology contrasted (as we saw earlier on) with the more mystical, traditional type of theology.

Scholastic theology was therefore from the beginning a way of doing theology that placed great emphasis on the importance of rational debate, using the fruits and tools of reason to probe the data of faith. It was, if you wish, the full flowering of the legitimate use of reason in theology.

That scholastic theology displaced the older, monastic type of theology was because of its undoubted merits. It brought to theology a precision and analytical thoroughness that it had not had before. It enabled theology to become a true academic discipline. It took seriously the idea that the believer is in a world which must not only be illuminated by Christianity's faith but which must also illuminate the understanding of that faith. It brought with it a drive towards systematisation that enabled a clearer picture of the inner unity binding the various Christian beliefs to each other to be expressed. This not only gave one a holistic picture of the faith, it also illuminated aspects of each individual doctrine that would otherwise be lost sight of.

However, its very merits also contained the seeds of its dangers and of its ultimate widespread rejection centuries later. These will be examined briefly below as a conclusion to our survey of medieval scholastic theology.

6.6 The dawning of specialisation

When dealing with the development of theology into an academic discipline, I referred in passing to the beginnings of specialisation that were beginning to manifest themselves. To complete this section on theology's new shape, let me expand a bit on that (for more details cf Evans 1980:40).

Traditionally, what we call 'theology' had been seen as being simply a study of the Bible. And medieval theologians would continue for quite some time yet to see their task as being basically just that. However, one can study the

Bible in two ways. One can either focus on the text and what it says, commenting on it and drawing out its meaning. Or one can focus on what one sees as its message – that is on the doctrines or beliefs that arose from reflection on it.

In the twelfth century, this distinction begins to become much clearer. The reason, of course, is that with the increasing dominance of the *quaestio* and the systematisation of such issues around logically arranged doctrinal themes, a form of theology became widespread that differed quite noticeably from the traditional straight commentary on the Bible.

As a result, two distinct types of theology arose. They will eventually become what they are today: two distinct specialisations within theology. One is the study of the Bible. The other is speculative theology (which is part of what we know as 'systematic theology'). Each specialisation will have its own clearly defined purpose and distinctive method. However, the close link between the two remains to this day.

The twelfth century was also a period in which Christians began to enter into debate with Muslim and Jewish ideas. This gave rise to a third type of theology, the beginnings of a third specialisation: apologetics.

Apologetics has been variously defined, but broadly speaking it is that part of theology that focuses on defending the Christian faith against its adversaries or giving the reasons for accepting Christianity. Of course, apologetics is a normal part of the intellectual equipment of most religions. Not surprisingly some of the earliest theological writings in the Christian church were written by people called 'apologists'. However, as Pelikan notes, the theologians of the twelfth century 'encountered, more intensely and more systematically than had any of their medieval predecessors, the spokesmen for other faiths' (1978:242). This was particularly true of Judaism. 'The twelfth century, therefore, seems to have produced more treatises of Jewish-Christian disputation than any preceding century of the Middle Ages, perhaps as many as all those centuries combined' (Pelikan 1978:246).

This third type of theology, too, had its own purpose and methods, distinct from those of biblical studies and speculative theology. The purpose was to show the error of the opposing position and its arguments, and provide convincing arguments for the Christian one. Hence, as regards method, the disputants had to search for starting points that would be agreed upon by

Christians and Jews or Christians and Muslims, and argue from there. One could not, as in biblical studies or speculative theology, appeal to patristic authority or that of the New Testament.

The twelfth century, then, witnessed the rise not only of theology as an academic discipline, but also the beginnings of specialisation within it, the beginnings of disciplines that will be known later as biblical studies, systematic (or dogmatic) theology, and apologetics.

7 | Some debates about the nature of theology (thirteenth and fourteenth centuries)

7.1 Introductory remarks

By the beginning of the thirteenth century the word 'theology' had come to refer to the discipline taught in the faculty of theology. The existence of a single name and the acceptance of the idea that theology was in some sense an art, that is a discipline with definable axioms and methods of procedure, gave it a unity. But this unity was more apparent than real. In fact, the new discipline contained within itself very different blocks of knowledge and correspondingly different theories about theology's procedural methods. In the next section we will therefore look at what sort of knowledge theologians had in mind when they talked about 'theology' and how their views on this changed. In the section following on that we will see how this affected theories about theology's procedural methods. This in turn will lead us to the final section, which will examine theology's 'scientific' character.

7.2 What kind of knowledge is theological knowledge?

When thirteenth-century writers theorised about 'theology', the central item that affected their theorising was the way in which they conceived of the

information, the truths, the body of knowledge (the *doctrina*, that is 'teaching') that was proper to theology. When they used the word 'theology' it was this body of knowledge that they particularly had in mind (for the detailed justification of all that follows cf Gaybba 1988, chapter 2).

Traditionally, this body of knowledge was conceived of as God's revelation as contained in the scriptures. It was therefore regarded as a purely transcendent body of knowledge, one communicated to humanity by God and therefore one that was not the result of human reasoning or human experience or human reflection. In practice, of course, theologians had for centuries been reflecting and commenting on that revelation. But that was seen simply as human reflection *on* revelation, of value only to the extent that it reflected and contained that revelation. And when in the thirteenth century discussions began to multiply about the nature of theology as a discipline, it was the pure, biblically based content of revelation that was conceived of as the knowledge, the information proper to this discipline.

However, when Peter Lombard's *Sentences* were introduced into the curriculum as a textbook alongside scripture, questions began to arise as to the status of the information it contained. Since it was a textbook that students had to master, the information within it seemed to merit the name 'theology'. Yet it was not the pure word of scripture. It was not unsullied revelation but clearly the product of a certain degree of human reflection. As noted above, it was Alexander of Hales who prescribed the *Sentences* for his students in Paris. While he himself does not display any concern with the theoretical issues that his act raised, the concern surfaces already in his pupil Odo Rigaldi, who recognises that the proper response to the information contained in the *Sentences* need not necessarily be faith – unlike the doctrinal content of scripture, which does demand faith as its proper response. For Odo the *Sentences* provide us with a deeper insight into the revelation contained in scripture. But in theorising about the sort of knowledge that is truly 'theological' knowledge, one can see his confusion. On the one hand, only what God has revealed is truly 'theology'. On the other hand, the *Sentences* cannot be regarded simply as non-theological material.

The confusion generated by a theological textbook that was not simply a verbatim repetition of scripture breaks out into the open in the Robert Kilwardby's prologue to his commentary on the *Sentences*. Kilwardby was an Oxford theologian and successor to Richard Fishacre. Fischacre had (against

opposition!) copied Alexander's action by introducing the *Sentences* as a text-book into the Oxford curriculum. For Kilwardby, theology's teaching or knowledge is basically a purely transcendent datum – namely God's revelation as found in the scriptures. But how then can the *Sentences* qualify as book containing theological knowledge? Kilwardby tries to solve this by asserting that one and the same revelation can exist in two different forms. The first form is that of scripture and it transmits revelation to us through parable, historical narrative, etc. The second form is that of the *Sentences* and it transmits revelation to us through the more academic form of definitions, distinctions and logical argumentation. However, clearly this is somewhat unsatisfactory since one could hardly regard the *Sentences* as simply containing revelation in another form. That even Kilwardby found it difficult to maintain such an idea is clear from a passage in which he distinguishes between the *teaching* contained in the *Sentences* and the *teaching* contained in what he calls 'the whole of sacred scripture'(cf Gaybba 1988:86). The phrase 'the whole of sacred scripture' was meant to include not only scripture but humanly authored works on scripture that clarified its meaning (for example commentaries by the Fathers, the book of *Sentences*). This was a common way of conceiving the relationship between scripture and the writings of the Fathers. Hence it would not have been difficult to extend it to the relationship between the scriptures and the book of *Sentences*, even though it was recognised and accepted that such humanly authored writings did not form part of the canon of scripture and could not lay claim to the inspiration that gave scripture its unique authority. It simply testified to the conviction that no teaching could claim to be part of theological knowledge if it did not reflect the revelation contained in the scriptures.

With Kilwardby, then, we see the problems caused by identifying theology's information or *doctrina* with an inspired text and yet seeing the identical transcendent knowledge incarnate in another non-inspired text break out into the open. The theory that identified theology's body of knowledge with revelation was increasingly being contradicted by a practice in which theology involved reflection on and debate about issues or *quaestiones* that arose out of human reflection on revelation.

It is only with Bonaventure, commenting on the *Sentences* somewhere between 1250 and 1252, that we will find a clear and consistent integration of theory and practice taking place for the first time. In his commentary on the *Sentences*, theology's body of knowledge, its 'teaching', is consistently seen as

the product of human reflection on scripture and therefore not to be con-
fused with scripture. It is true that he simply switches texts: theology's body
of knowledge is now widened so as to include the knowledge found in the
Sentences. In this respect he displays another traditional idea about theology's
body of knowledge, namely that it is fixed in a text. However, this is a minor
point and elsewhere Bonaventure himself hints that the contents of writings
by other 'doctors' also belong to this widened vision of theology's body of
knowledge. Interestingly enough, however, at virtually the same time that
Bonaventure was expounding these views in Paris, his fellow Fransciscan in
Oxford, Richard Rufus, was vehemently defending the thesis that the con-
tents of the *Sentences* were most certainly *not* 'theology', since theology's
teaching was simply revelation.'This compendium [that is the *Sentences*] is not
itself theology nor is it any part of it. It is holy scripture, in itself complete and
perfect without this or any other compendium [that is such]'(cf Gaybba
1988:97). This gives one an insight into the tensions and confusion about
what should or should not be regarded as part of theology's specific body of
knowledge.

The shift we find in Bonaventure is retained by Thomas Aquinas, who wrote
his commentary on the *Sentences* about four years later. He is not as consistent
as Bonaventure, since at times he speaks in ways that make sense only if one
conceives of theology's body of knowledge as being exclusively revelation.
But his main emphasis is on a conception of that knowledge that includes the
fruits of human reflection on revelation.

Thomas sees theology as consisting of two types of knowledge. The first is
what he calls theology's 'principles'. The second comprises the 'conclusions'
derived from the principles. The distinction between theology's 'principles'
and its 'conclusions' and the identification of the principles with the articles
of faith had already been outlined by William of Auxerre in his *Summa aurea*
(1220–1225). It is the same sort of distinction as we saw being made in the
twelfth century between theology's basic axioms and the body of knowledge
built on them. It is a distinction that was important in trying to structure
theological studies in such a way that they took on the clear shape of an
academic discipline. Thomas takes up this distinction and makes it central to
his exposition of the nature of theology as a discipline.

For Thomas (I am siding here with what I believe to be the correct inter-
pretation of Aquinas, cf Gaybba 1988:99, 106) the whole of revelation – and

not just the articles of faith in the creed – serves as theology's 'principles'. Hence, for him theology's traditional *doctrina* or body of knowledge becomes theology's *principles*. The fruits of human reflection – whether it is seeing the logical connection between various revealed truths or whether it is drawing further conclusions utilising secular knowledge – belong to the area of theology's *conclusions*. It is the fruits of such human reflection rather than the principles themselves that form the distinctive body of knowledge proper to theology. Of course, the principles are included, but they form the foundation rather than the main body of theological knowledge. The inclusion of the two in theology's body of knowledge does cause some confusion – especially since at times Thomas speaks as if theology's only body of knowledge is revealed truth (which elsewhere functions for him simply as principles). But Thomas is basically in agreement with Bonaventure in that both disentangle divine revelation and the products of human reflection on it. Both move moreover in the direction of regarding the latter as constituting theology's real body of knowledge. Theory is aligning itself at long last with practice, since in fact the discipline of theology had produced a massive amount of material that could only be regarded as human reflection on revelation and not revelation itself. The traditional identification of theology's *doctrina* with a transcendent body of knowledge derived its strength from the equally traditional idea that all Christian thinking must be but an attempt to uncover the meaning of scripture. However, to Bonaventure and Aquinas must go the credit for taking seriously the idea that it is impossible to uncover the meaning of scripture without also adding one's own insights. They may not have viewed it that way. But they realised clearly that theology's body of knowledge was one that had been built up by the application of rational thought and argumentation to God's revelation. With them, then, the gap between a theory of theology's body of knowledge and what the schools were actually producing was closed.

7.3 Theology's procedural methods

One of the distinguishing characteristics of an academic discipline was that it clarified and taught its pupils the methods used for discovering and building up its body of knowledge. Hence, the thirteenth century witnessed for the first time an ongoing debate about the methods of procedure proper to

theology. The answers given to this question depended very much on the view taken of theology's body of knowledge.

As long as one stuck to the traditional idea that theology's body of knowledge was God's revelation as found in the scriptures, then clearly the ways in which that knowledge was conveyed to those who sought it was through the various literary forms to be found in the biblical text. For – so it was argued – that was the way in which God conveyed the divine Word to us. Theology's procedural method was therefore nothing other than the methods used by God in scripture. How then does scripture convey its revealed message to us? It does so in a variety of ways, according to the demands of theology's practical aim and human limitations. As regards the practical aim, in order to move people to respond to the Word, scripture conveys some of its knowledge in the form of prayer, some in the form of commands, some in the form of knowledge that is wisdom, some in the form of practical examples drawn especially from historical events. These were called the prayerful, preceptive, revelatory and exemplary modes of conveying the revealed Word. As regards the limitations of the human mind, this is catered for by scripture's use of the 'poetic' mode, that is, one that conveys its transcendent information mainly through symbols. We find retained here as a biblical 'procedural mode' an idea that was central to monastic theology – namely the inherently symbolic character of all theology.

Conceiving of theology's body of knowledge as God's revelation left no place for debate or deductive reasoning in establishing its contents. The only response to revelation is to accept in faith what is presented. Reason cannot *establish* revelation. It can only defend it against heretics (as Paul did in arguing the case for the Resurrection), strengthen the faith of believers and assist unbelievers in coming to faith, as William of Auxerre summed the tradition up in his *Summa aurea* (cf Gaybba 1988:121). As long, then, as one equated theology's body of knowledge with revelation, reason can play no role in establishing that knowledge. The tension between theory and practice referred to in the previous section breaks out here again. For on the one hand, we read repeatedly that rational argumentation was not a proper way for 'theology' to operate, while theologians not only used rational arguments but, as an essential part of their training, had to become proficient at its techniques, as we saw. This was to some extent enshrined in Peter Lombard's *Sentences* and therefore could not be ignored. The tension breaks out – predictably (see previous section) – in Robert Kilwardby. Having noted that

reasoned argumentation is *not* a fitting procedural method for theology ('reasoned argumentation does not belong to it ... therefore the proper procedure for scripture is partly that of precept, partly that of exhortation'), he finds himself confronted with the question: why then do the *Sentences* (which he sees as part of theology – see above) use such argumentation? The answer is inevitable, being the only answer possible in the circumstances: 'not out of necessity for the body of knowledge *(scientia)* but because of the infirmity of others, namely in order that the disposition of the weak be aided, that of the faithful be strengthened and that of those in error be informed to at least the extent of illuminating their vision' (see Gaybba 1988:121). It is a repetition of the tradition summed up by William in his *Summa*.

However, once one begins to include the fruits of human reflection on revelation as being part and parcel of theology's body of knowledge, the picture changes dramatically. As we saw, for Bonaventure and Aquinas, revelation now becomes theology's *foundation*, its *principles*, the material it takes as its starting point. As an academic discipline, theology's main body of knowledge is built onto that. And that takes place primarily through rational argumentation (albeit illumined by faith). The ways in which scripture communicates its contents to the reader are now ways in which scripture communicates theology's *foundations*, its *principles*. Both Bonaventure and Aquinas, therefore, have no difficulty in stating that theology's proper procedural method *is* rational argumentation. Aquinas puts the final touches to the picture by comparing theology to any other academic discipline and pointing out (what was accepted in his day) that no discipline proves its basic principles but only what flows from them: 'Just as the other sciences do not use argumentation to prove their principles but only to demonstrate other things from those principles, so too does this discipline [theology] not use argumentation to establish its principles, which are the articles of faith, but rather to demonstrate something or other from them' (*Summa Theologiae*, I, q 1, a 8 resp).

7.4 Is theology a 'science'?

That theology was now one of several disciplines in a university inevitably invited comparisons with the other disciplines. And one of the points of comparison was its standing as a 'scientia'. The term meant not just 'knowledge' (which is its literal translation) but knowledge that can be regarded as

established, as certain, as something that could not be doubted because its inner evidence was clear. Only then was something truly *known*, and not simply a matter of conjecture or faith or probability. In his *Posterior analytics* Aristotle had clarified the conditions necessary for such knowledge and so the discussions about theology's 'scientific' character were conducted against the background of those conditions (hence they did not mean then what we mean by 'science' today; instead they meant an academic discipline whose body of knowledge could not rationally be doubted).

The thirteenth century has often been presented as one in which theologians moved from a position which held that theology was not a science to one which held that it was a science. However, this is not accurate, despite Aquinas's theory of theology as a subalternate science (which we will examine briefly below). If one examines the literature of the period it is clear that the general conclusion of the thirteenth century was that theology was *not* a 'science' in the strict (that is, the Aristotelian) sense of the term. It is doubtful if even Aquinas saw it as such.

All could agree that theology was a *scientia* in the broad sense of information about which one had certainty for a variety of reasons. Thus Odo Rigaldi makes the following distinctions and applies them to theology: ' "Science" or "knowledge" can be understood in two ways: either in a more general or in a strict sense. In the strict sense it is the name given to the disposition (*habitus*) whereby one has the sort of certainty that our reason or intellect can achieve by itself. It is thus a disposition acquired by our own efforts. Taken in this sense theology is certainly not "knowledge", certainly not a "science" ... However, if we take "knowledge" in the broad sense of any intellectual knowledge about which we have certainty ... then we must agree that theology is "knowledge", is a "science" ' (*Quaestiones theologiae*, q 1 resp).

All could also agree that theology was *more* than a science. It was wisdom and as such was seen as the queen of the sciences. Hence, on the principle that the lesser was contained in the greater, theology could be said to be in some sense or other a *scientia* or 'science'. But strictly speaking – no. To be such was beneath its dignity, for it implied that theology's truth was on the same level as all other knowledge, whereas it transcended all such knowledge since it came directly from and was authenticated by God.

Several objections to the idea that theology was a science were discussed and not all were felt to be equally valid. For example, Aristotle had argued that a true

science deals only with what is universally and necessarily true. But scripture is filled with individual historical events and the deeds of individuals. How can the knowledge of such contingencies be regarded as constituting a 'science'? The main thrust of the replies given was that these events are presented as but individual examples of more enduring and universally applicable divine principles or realities. Theology does deal with universal truths, then, but ones that are manifested through particular events. The symbolist/Platonic background to this is obvious. Another objection was that a true science uses rational argumentation. But such argumentation was not proper to theology. This objection (and to some extent the previous one too) clearly has its full force only where theology's body of knowledge is identified exclusively with God's revelation, and especially when identified with the biblical expression of that revelation. It falls away once theology's body of knowledge is widened so as to include the fruits of human reflection on revelation. But these and other objections were relatively minor in comparison to the most fundamental one of all: namely that theology's body of knowledge was either entirely accepted on faith (the old, transcendent view of theology's body of knowledge) or was based on faith (the newer view, in which revelation constituted theology's foundation). Hence in tracing the foundations of theology's claims a point is arrived at where inner evidence is lacking. According to Aristotle's criteria, the body of knowledge making up any 'scientific' discipline must rest on rational arguments, arguments that can be pushed back ultimately to principles that are *per se nota*, that is, immediately evident, whose truth is so clear that it needs no demonstration.

This objection was one that, I believe, made even Aquinas regard his own otherwise brilliant portrayal of theology as a *subalternate* science as something not to be taken literally. Let us examine his views in a bit more detail.

A *subalternate* science was recognised as a true science. It differed from other sciences, however, in that it used as its principles knowledge that had been established by another science, which was called the *subalternating* one. One could speak of the subalternate science as taking its principles 'on faith' from the subalternating one. The example Aquinas uses from his own time is the 'art of perspectives which draws on principles derived from geometry'. The concept is one we are all familiar with. A computer scientist need not be an expert mathematician in order to take on trust mathematical insights and apply them in the field of computer science.

Bonaventure had already spoken of theology as a body of knowledge 'sub-

alternate to' scripture. His point was that theology was a body of knowledge built on 'scripture, taking its foundational information from scripture. However, he did not apply this idea of subalternation to the debate about theology's scientific character (he does not appear to have addressed that question at all). Aquinas, on the other hand, did do so. Whenever Aquinas poses the question as to whether theology is a 'science' he always gives the straightforward (and unusual for its time) answer: yes, it is. He then goes on to show in what sense it is a science. Theology is, he explains, a subalternate science. It is such since it takes its principles, its foundational information, from the knowledge that God and the blessed in heaven enjoy of divine things (note the shift away from identifying theology's foundation simply with biblical revelation to rooting it in the knowledge enjoyed by another mind – God's mind and that of the blessed who see God face to face in heaven). 'Theology is a science. But it needs to be pointed out that there are two kinds of sciences. There are those that proceed from principles known by the natural light of reason ... And there are those which proceed from principles known by the light of a superior science. For example, the art of perspective draws on principles derived from geometry ... And in this way theology is a science, because it proceeds from principles known by the light of a superior science, namely that body of knowledge enjoyed by God and the blessed in heaven' (*Summa theologiae*, I, q 1, a 2). Remember that the term 'science' means here a body of knowledge that is indubitable because its inner rationale is fully grasped by the knower.

That this is a brilliant comparison between theology and a subalternate science cannot be questioned. But did Thomas Aquinas intend it to be more than that? Did he believe that theology fulfilled all the criteria for a truly subalternate science? I believe that there are good indications that he did not. For he was aware that, as he himself put it on another occasion, 'the person who has subalternate knowledge, can only be said to know in the strict sense of the term if there is a certain continuity between his or her knowledge and that of the person who possesses the subalternating knowledge' (*De veritate*, q 14, a 9, arg 3, ad 3). By 'continuity' he meant that in principle someone should be able to follow through the chain of reasoning back through the principles that had been accepted on faith until one arrives at immediately evident principles. A human mind should, in principle, be able to resolve the subalternating body of knowledge into its first principles, thus establishing clearly the logical continuity between the subalternate and subalternating

sciences. It should be possible for someone to follow the chain of logical argumentation supporting the principles that were, simply for the sake of convenience, taken on faith by the subalternate science. One should be able to follow that chain of reasoning back to immediately evident principles.

Thomas himself argued that there was indeed *some* continuity between the two blocks of knowledge – that possessed by God (and the blessed) and that which resulted from human reflection on revelation. The continuity was found in the fact that through faith we were united to God and, united to God, we shared to some extent or other in God's own self-knowledge. But we share only 'to some extent'. And at that point the strict parallel between theology and other subalternate sciences breaks down.

Whether or not Thomas believed that theology was *truly,* that is *literally,* a subalternate science was disputed from the thirteenth century onwards. Some of his closest followers believed he did not mean it to be taken literally. But he did draw a parallel between subalternate sciences and theology that was taken up and commented on by subsequent writers. The idea of viewing theology as a 'science of conclusions' became widely accepted, particularly within Thomistic scholasticism and was accepted as such even if it was acknowledged that this did not mean that theology was a science in the strict sense of the term.

The one notable exception to the general consensus that theology was a science only in a broad sense was Henry of Ghent. He evolved an extraordinary theory that theologians benefited from a special divine light that gave them just sufficient insight into theology's principles (that is, revelation) to enable them to go beyond faith to an understanding of those principles that would give theology a truly scientific character – while allowing a sufficient obscurity for faith to continue to exist. It was a tortuous and untenable position for which this otherwise outstanding theologian was roundly and justly attacked (see his *Summa*, a 6, q 1; cf also Gaybba 1988:145).

There have been those who have held that there was a time in the thirteenth century when a generally positive answer was given to the question of theology's scientific character (cf Gaybba 1988:147). However, my own examination of the evidence has convinced me that this is not so. Thirteenth-century theologians believed (and rightly so) that theology bore many similarities to a true 'science' in Aristotle's sense of the term and therefore to the scientific character that other disciplines in the universities of the day

claimed. However, while they sang the praises of theology as the noblest and queen of the sciences, as the knowledge in whose light all other things must be evaluated, as the most certain, most sublime *scientia* we have on this earth, they were fully aware that it lacked several elements present in a true 'science', above all inner evidence, an insight into the logical necessity of its principles. Hence, the overwhelming response to the question of theology's scientific character was that it was not a 'science' – in the strict sense of the term.

As a footnote to this section it is worth observing that the debate that has arisen in modern times about theology's status as an academic discipline in a university goes back almost to the point when theology became an academic discipline. The only difference is that in those days the legitimacy of theology's presence in the university was unquestioned, even while its status as a 'scientia' was debated, whereas today questions about its status as an academic discipline are closely linked to questions about its legitimacy as a human science in a university setting.

7.5 What then is 'theology'?

The wide acceptance of the idea that theology was a deductive discipline composed of conclusions drawn from revelation led to a focusing of attention, especially in fourteenth-century authors, on the issue of the exact nature of theological activity.

The issue had already been discussed in several thirteenth-century writers but it became a particularly pressing one in the fourteenth century since by that time it was generally accepted that theologians performed a wide range of activities in the execution of their task. These were broadly categorised as follows: they assented in faith to the contents of scripture; they explained and defended scripture's contents, using whatever rational tools were suitable for the task; (they drew conclusions from the articles of faith and scripture, thereby broadening the explicitly known body of theological knowledge (see for example Durandus of Saint Pourçain, *In Sent*, Prol q 1; Gaybba 1988:197–200).

'Theology' and 'theological work' had become umbrella terms and it was generally accepted that 'doing theology' involved a variety of activities. But were all of these activities truly 'theological' activities? For example, since unbelievers could in principle explain the scriptures and even use logic to

draw conclusions from them and the articles of faith, would that mean that they were doing *theology*?

William of Ockham's response was to argue that for any specific activity to be theological it had to be connected in some way or other to the theologian's own faith. It had to be an activity directed towards acquiring a broader grasp of one's faith or extending the area of explicit truths comprising the cognitive content of one's faith (see his *In Sent*, Prol q 7).

From the above it can be seen that this area of debate went hand in hand with the issue of the sort of certainty generated by theological activity. Was it the certainty of faith? That is to say, were theology's findings truths that now demanded an assent in faith? Or was the certainty generated by those findings something other than faith? The conclusions that were now accepted as part of theological work could be drawn in one of two ways. Either both premises were taken from revelation or one was taken from revelation and one from secular knowledge. In the former case the conclusion would seem to warrant the assent of faith since it rested entirely on God's word. In the latter case it would not seem to warrant that assent, since it rested partially on God's word and partially on the discoveries made by human reason. Are both types of conclusion to be regarded as 'theological' or only the former? But even as regards the former, was not reason involved in making the logical connection between the two revealed premises and drawing the conclusion that followed? Did this mean that such an activity could not be 'theology'? For some, you only had theology in the strict sense when all the premises were drawn from revelation. For others, the use of secular knowledge was a perfectly legitimate part of theology. For some, the assent involved in theology was the assent of faith. For others, it was distinct from faith.

It would be impossible to go into the complexities of the debates here and the variety of positions adopted (details can be found in chapter 6 of Gaybba 1988). Suffice it to say that the issue was raised and debated at length – demonstrating once again that the theologians of the day were fully aware of the theoretical issues raised by their discipline. In particular, it is interesting how an issue widely debated to-day – namely whether one needs to have faith in order to be an academic theologian – was one that surfaced soon after theology had become established as an academic discipline that functioned in ways similar to other academic disciplines in the use it made of rational investigation and debate.

Sectional loyalties and the decline of creativity (fourteenth and fifteenth centuries)

8.1 The rise of sectional loyalties

The type of theology that we saw developing in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries came, as we saw, to be known as 'scholastic theology'. Initially there were no particular schools within this new type of theology. However, such schools did eventually develop. In the middle of the thirteenth century Thomas Aquinas created a form of scholasticism that would become typical of his religious order, the Dominicans. His brand of scholasticism would be called 'Thomism'.

The rival religious order of the times, the Franciscans, found in Bonaventure, a contemporary of Aquinas, their great intellectual light. Bonaventure's approach contrasts sharply with that of Aquinas because Bonaventure holds on to Augustine's views about how the mind comes to understand divine realities, while Aquinas had shifted to a more Aristotelian epistemology. Towards the end of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth century the Franciscans produced another intellectual giant – John Duns Scotus. Scotus

retained many of Bonaventure's insights but developed his own highly intricate scholastic system, one in which he differed from Aquinas on many points. Once again, the most basic difference was epistemological – namely about the way the mind comes to know truth, especially divine truth. It was Scotus's system that would become the typical Franciscan form of scholasticism and which came to be known as 'Scotism'.

Later, another Franciscan, William of Ockham, developed his own form of Scotus's thought. It was to be a radical break with all previous forms of scholasticism since it attacked a key idea on which both Thomist and Scotist forms of scholasticism had been based, namely that the concepts (known as 'universals') used by the mind for grasping what were called the 'essences' of things corresponded to essences really existing in those things themselves. Ockham argued that these concepts were simply names used to refer to such things. He was not new in holding this position, which was known as 'nominalism'. But he did so with a rigour and a thoroughness that led to the formation of a third major type of scholastic thought in medieval times. This came to be known as the 'via nova', the 'new way' in contrast to the older way of both the Thomist and Scotist types of scholasticism. It was this Ockhamist type of scholasticism that would have a major influence on Luther through the writings of Gabriel Biel, a devout follower of Ockham's 'way'.

Scholasticism, therefore, was not a homogenous entity. Like any other vibrant intellectual movement, it spawned a variety of ways of utilising reason to probe the data of faith. I mentioned three major ways above – Thomist, Scotist and Ockhamist. There were other ways too but they did not develop into any major system such as these three did. Initially this was a good thing. However, in the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries sectional loyalties developed that effectively stifled all creativity. The loyalties became so total that the practice developed of not simply repeating the chosen master's ideas (for example those of Thomas or Scotus or Ockham) but, as far as possible, his exact words. The questions posed are usually the questions posed by the master. And they are normally posed in the same order and using the same words. There is certainly no attempt to stand back – as fourteenth-century thinkers such as Ockham, Peter d'Ailly and Gregory of Rimini did – in order to survey the field and attempt to produce a synthesis that represents the author's own personal convictions or even to dialogue with the master's thoughts so as to give them new depths or applications, as will become typical of sixteenth-century Thomism. Indeed, there is a clear decision to avoid

personal convictions as far as possible. Thus, Gabriel Biel announces that he intends simply to present Ockham's views and that he therefore sees Ockham and not himself as being the master of the book that is to follow. What is more, he defends this on the grounds that to follow one master is a surer way to the truth. The reason is that one thereby avoids being thrown about by the conflicting winds of opinion. Capreolus, in turn, says that he in no way wishes to express his own views but simply to present those of Thomas, a procedure from which he will deviate only rarely. Even when refuting views critical of Thomas, he says that he will do so using Thomas's own words. And, to give but two examples from the extensive Scotist material, William Gorris says that his book should bear not his name but that of Scotus, since it is simply a stream flowing from Scotus as its source while Nicholas of Orbelle declares in his introductory remarks that his intention is simply to put Scotus's views across in a more digestible form' (Gaybba 1994:107–108). So myopic were the printed expositions of the master's thought that most dissenting views that had arisen since the master had completed his work were simply ignored as if they did not exist.

There is a new form of traditionalism here. But it differed from that which was characteristic of the monastic theology that scholasticism displaced. Whereas the monks stood in awe of the entire range of patristic thought, what we are witnessing here is the elevation of a chosen individual's thought to a point beyond criticism. The destructive character of these loyalties and the intellectual sterility generated by them were already decried at the beginning of the fifteenth century by Gerson who sees in it an abandonment of commitment to the truth in favour of commitment to one's own school of thought. 'If,' he says, 'there is one Lord, one Faith, one Law, if truth is something we possess in common, something moreover that comes from the Holy Spirit no matter who utters it, then what is the point of all this heated fighting between the different states and orders of Christianity? What is the point of defending, adulating and giving preeminence to one particular doctor rather than another? Why should this group defend only these doctors and that group defend only those?' *(Contra curiositatem studentium.)*

8.2 The decline of creativity

This sectional loyalty stifled creativity so much so that when one reads fifteenth-century views on the nature of theology one is simply turning the

clock back and reading what either Aquinas or Scotus or Ockham had to say. However, the decline in creativity that occurred in the fifteenth century was also due in large measure to the reprisals that could be taken against theologians who stepped out of line. It was a time when theological innovation was risky and so the safest path was to repeat, with protestations of reverence, the accepted luminaries of the past (cf Gaybba, 1994:109–111). It is not accidental that the only truly creative approach, that of John Huss, came from the pen of someone who was condemned as a heretic.

Huss's exposition of the nature of theology as a discipline is refreshingly different from what had become by then the traditional way of dealing with the material. 'There is a passion and a piety, a reverence and reforming zeal about his commentary that, despite its brevity, lifts it above the other major commentaries of the time and especially above the slavish repetitiveness (bred by school loyalties and fear of censure) of subsequent commentaries in the fifteenth century. When reading his exposition one sees immediately the greater affinity he had with theologians of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries than with the later scholastics. This is revealed not merely in the fact that he uses the old term for theology – *sacra scriptura*, 'sacred scripture' – but also and especially in his repeated emphasis on the crucial role played by the theologian's dispositions in attempting to understand the revealed deposit.

The central idea around which his exposition turns is that theology or *sacra scriptura* is a wisdom originating indeed from God but one that flows only into the minds of those whose hearts are open to God's action. Hence he begins with a lengthy examination of the text "if you lack wisdom, seek it from God" (James 1:5)' (Gaybba 1994a:79–80). That Huss made the issue of the theologian's moral dispositions *the* single question around which everything else was discussed was not only a bold reformist action in itself but also a pointed criticism of a style of theologising that seemed to have long forgotten monastic theology's insistence on the dependence of the theologian on God's illuminating grace.

Huss's approach reminds us, therefore, of another reason for the decline in creativity, namely that scholastic theology had developed into a highly abstract form of reflection and discussion, one in which ideas were dissected into ever-smaller parts. The seeds for this development were contained in the very qualities that made scholasticism so attractive to the youth of the day

when it first appeared on the scene. We saw above how the cut and thrust of formal theological debate, which was the heart of the *quaestio*, was of the utmost importance for theology's development. But it brought in its train the gradual disappearance of serious patristic studies. As the search for organic inner unity proceeded hand in hand with the development of the *quaestio*, the issues being debated were studied with the aid of dialectics and collections of patristic sayings that had been wrenched from their contexts – and which were therefore interpreted, when obscure, by means once again of dialectics. As Grabmann remarks (1911:85) it was no wonder that in the twelfth century the anti-dialecticians were also the ones who complained that the reading of the Fathers was disappearing. Of course not all were guilty of this. Men such as Hugh of St Victor, Gilbert of Poitiers, Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure certainly read many of the Fathers' works themselves and did not rely simply on citations. But the trend was clear. The symptoms can be seen in the decrease by the end of the thirteenth century of manuscript copies of patristic writings and an increase, from the thirteenth century onwards, of manuscripts of *quaestiones*, etc (Grabmann 1911:85).

It is this trend that brought scholasticism into widespread disrepute by the end of the Middle Ages. For the major cause of its decadence was that it became a dry philosophical analysis of minute details utterly removed from any perceptible link with experienced reality and without the life-giving vitality of the patristic period. Anything cut off from its roots withers and ultimately dies. Scholasticism withered badly, even if it did not die completely.

The decadence occurred particularly in the Scotist form of scholasticism, which was the dominant form from the fourteenth to the end of the fifteenth centuries. The very word 'dunce' comes from the ridicule that came to be poured on the sort of theologising done by the followers of John *Duns* Scotus. The Thomist form only began to gain some sort of ascendency in the sixteenth century, where new concerns (the issues and debates raised by the Reformation) and new centres of learning (Paris had become lifeless; Salamanca in Spain had become one of the new and exciting scholastic centres) arose and which therefore gave a liveliness and a relevance to it.

As a footnote to all of this, it can be noted that while Luther, and with him the reformers in general, poured scorn on scholasticism and had little to say in its favour, barely fifty years later we see Protestantism developing its own

form of scholasticism (which came to be known as Protestant 'Orthodoxy'). Stranger still is it to see a Protestant theologian such as Musaeus recasting Protestant theology into a typically Aristotelian-scholastic format, regarding himself as a scholastic in the age-old scholastic tradition dialoguing with those he regarded as his Catholic scholastic predecessors!