

THEOLOGY

In general, any treatment, discourse or preaching which has God and divine things as its subject. The word was used in this very general sense by the great Roman scholar Marcus Terentius Varro (first century B.C.); St. Augustines has preserved for us Varro's destination the three of the theologies: *mythical* or *fabulous* theology; *natural* or *physical* theology; and *civil theology*. Mythical or fabulous theology is that of which the poets make use and which admits many fiction contraire to the dignity and the nature of divinity. Natural theology is the of the philosophers, which has as its object "what the gods are, the place where they reside, their kind, their essence, the time in which they were born and the time they will endure; whether they are their beginnings in fire, as Heraclitus believes, of in number as Pythagoras says or in the atoms, according to Epicurus". Finally, civil theology "is that theology which the citizens of a city, and especially the priests, must know and practice and which teaches which divinities are to be honoured publicly and what ceremonies are to be performed and what sacrifices offered" (St. Augustine: *De Civitate Dei*, VI,5). In this, Varro's sense, Vico considered his "new sciences" as a "reasoned civil theology of providence" in as much as it takes its origin in "the vulgar wisdom of the lawgivers who founded the nations through contemplation of God under his attribute of providence (*Scienza Nuova*, II, Corollaries concerning the principles aspects of this science). In a more specifically historical-philosophical sense there may be distinguished: 1) metaphysical theology; 2) natural theology; 3) revealed theology; 4) negative theology.

1. Aristotle called his "first science", that is metaphysics, theology: understanding it, at the same time, as a science of being as being, that is, science of substances and as a science of the eternal, unchanging and separate substance, that is, God (*Meta.* VI, 1, 1026 a 10). For Plotinus, theology was the only science worthy of the name (*Enneads*, V, 9, 7). From this point of view, the Neoplatonists frequently called all philosophers theologians, including the physicist or the materialist, since they too, as Proclus says, concern themselves with "the very first principles of things as subsistent" (*Plat. Theolog.*, I, 3). This is also the meaning which Varro attributed to the term "natural theology", this use continued into Christian philosophy: neither in the patristic period nor in the first period of scholasticism is it possible to draw a precise line of demarcation between theology and philosophy. St. Thomas himself, in an early phase of his teaching, accepted the identity of theology and metaphysics as appears from the prologue of his commentary on the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle. Here he says that since metaphysics, in the second place, separated or divine science or theology, in so far as it considers being and first philosophy in so far as it considers the first causes of things" (*In Meta.* Proemium).

In the seventeenth century, the "first philosophy" which was also called *ontology* (q.v.) began to be distinguished from theology, and theology as a natural science also began to be distinguished from theology based on revelation. These distinctions are to be found clearly established in the *De Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623) of Francis Bacon, who called *natural theology* the knowledge of God which can be obtained "by means of the light of nature and the contemplation of created things" (*Op. cit.*, III, 2) and inspired or sacred theology that founded on principles directly inspired by God (*Op. cit.*, III, 1).

2. The second concept of theology is therefore that of *natural theology* which is distinguishing from the preceding only by the fact that it comprehends a part and not the whole of metaphysics; to be exact that part which has divine things as its object. The Baconian expression "natural theology" was taken up again and spread abroad by Wolff; he defined it as "the science of which is possible by God's action" and therefore as a part of philosophy, which is, in general, the science of possible things (*Logica, Disc. Prael.*, § 57). Baumgartner placed emphasis on the rational character of theology thus understood, "Natural theology is the science of God in so far as he can be known without faith (*Meta.*, § 800); and he thought of it as the basis of practical philosophy, or natural theology and of revealed theology (*Op.cit.*, § 601). This was the concept of theology which, together with its content, fell under Kant's criticism in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Nevertheless, Kant also occupied himself with distinguishing the various varieties of theology; and taking his point of departure in the basic distinction between rational and revealed theology, he distinguished, within rational theology, *transcendental* theology, which "conceives its object simply with pure reason", by way of mere transcendental concepts, and *originarium, realissimum, ens entium*)" and *natural* theology which makes use of "concept drawn from nature". Transcendental theology may also in its turn be *cosmo theology*, if it deduces the existence of God from experience in general; or *onto theology* if it deduces his existence with simple concept without recourse to experience. Finally, natural theology may be

either *physical* theology, if it rises to the consideration of God's attributes from the order and constitution of the world; or moral theology if it considers God as the principle of moral perfection and the moral order (*Critique of Pure Reason*, Dialectic, ch. III, sect. VII). Some of these distinctions have persisted and are still used in the field of ecclesiastical theology.

3. *Revealed* or *sacred* theology is theology which takes its principles from revelation. The first explicit formulation of this concept is, probably, the Thomistic: St. Thomas affirms that "sacred doctrine is science since it proceeds from known principles in the light of a superior science, which is the science of God and the blessed" (*S.Th.*, I, q.1,a.2). The "science of God and of the blessed" then coincides with "the articles of faith" or "divine revelation" (*Op.cit.*, loc. cit. a, 7-8). This was the theology which Duns Scotus considered an entirely *practical* science, compared to metaphysics, which he considered the theoretical science *par excellence*: theology indeed has no other scope than to persuade man to act for his own salvation (*Op. Ox. Prol. Q 4, n. 42*). And the very truths which are in appearance theoretical would have only practical value, as for example, the proposition "God is trinity" which would include simply the knowledge of the right love which man should have for God (*Op. cit.*, loc. cit., q 4, n.31). The denial of cognitive value to theology persists, toward the end of scholasticism, even when this practical character was not attributed to the whole of it. Ockham considered theology not as a science, but simply as a group of different kinds of knowledge, both theoretical and practical, resting exclusively on authority and having as its scope the advancement of man along the road of salvation (*In Sent.*, Prol. Q 12, E -1). This concept is not very different from that which Spinoza was to expound some time later in his *Tractatus theologico politicus* (cf. especially Ch. 15 of that work).
4. The concept of *negative theology* arose and was handed down in the ambient of mysticism. The distinction between positive or affirmative theology which proceeds from God to the finite by way of the determination of the attributes, or *names* of God, and negative theology, which proceeds from the finite to God and considers him to be above all the predicates of names with which it is possible to designate him, is to be found in the treatises of Pseudo – Dionysius the Areopagite (*De myst. theol.*, 1; *De div. nom.* I, 4; 4,2; 13,1; *De eccl. hierar.*, 2,3); but its source lies in finite determinations and even above being itself (v. Transcendence). It is repeated by Scotus Eriugena (*De divisionibus naturae*, II, 30) taken up again by German speculative mysticism of the fourteenth century (cf. Eckhart, in Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker des 14 Jahrhunderts*, II, pp. 318-319); and in the Renaissance by Nicholas of Cusa (*De docta ignorantia*, I, 24; 26) and by Bovillus (*De nihilo*, II, 1,4). The so-called "theology of crisis" of Karl Barth may be considered a manifestation of negative theology, re-experienced under the influence of Kierkegaard, with the qualification that such a theology does not consist in denying finite attributes to God but in considering the relation between man and God as the negation of all human possibilities (*crisis*) and their reduction to mere impossibility, so that only from this negation is a possibility of salvation born, now no longer human, but divine, in origin (*Romerbrief*, 1919).

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