

Thomas de Aquino,
***Summa theologiae*, First part, question 1, articles 1-2**

In order to situate our goal within certain set limits, we must first inquire into what sacred doctrine (*sacra doctrina*) is and how far it extends. On this matter there are ten questions to be asked: (1) Is this doctrine necessary? (2) Is it a science? (3) Is it a single science or more than one science? (4) Is it a speculative science or a practical science? (5) How does it compare to the other sciences? (6) Does it constitute wisdom? (7) What is its subject? (8) Does it make use of arguments? (9) Is it appropriate for it to make use of metaphorical or symbolic locutions? (10) Should the Sacred Scripture relevant to this doctrine be expounded by means of multiple senses?

Article 1

Is it necessary to have a doctrine over and beyond the philosophical disciplines?

It seems unnecessary to have any doctrine over and beyond the philosophical disciplines:

Objection 1: According to Ecclesiasticus 3:22 (“Seek not the things that are too high for you”), man should not strive for things that lie beyond reason. But the things that fall under reason are adequately treated in the philosophical disciplines. Therefore, it seems superfluous to have a doctrine over and beyond the philosophical disciplines.

Objection 2: There cannot be a doctrine that is not about some being, since nothing is known except the true, which is convertible with being. But all beings are treated in the philosophical disciplines, even God—this is why one part of philosophy is called theology or divine science, as is clear from the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 6. Therefore, it was unnecessary to have another doctrine over and beyond the philosophical disciplines. But contrary to this: 2 Timothy 3:16 says: “All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice.” But divinely inspired Scripture is not pertinent to the philosophical disciplines, which have been devised according to human reason. Therefore, it is advantageous that, over and beyond the philosophical disciplines, there should be another science that is divinely inspired.

I respond: It was necessary for human salvation that, over and beyond the philosophical disciplines devised by human reason, there should be a doctrine conformable with divine revelation. For, first of all, according to Isaiah 64:4 (“The eye has not seen, O God, apart from You, what things You have prepared for them that wait for You”), man is ordered toward God as an end who exceeds the comprehension of reason. But the end must first be known to men, since they have to order their intentions and actions toward the end. Hence, it was necessary for man’s salvation that certain things exceeding human reason should be made known to him through divine revelation. In addition, it was necessary for man to be instructed by divine revelation even with respect to those things about God that can be discovered by human reason. For the truth about God that is discovered by reason would come to man only from a few, and after a long time, and mixed in with many errors. But the whole of man’s salvation, which lies in God, depends on the cognition of this truth. Therefore, in order that salvation should come to men more suitably and more surely, it was necessary for them to be instructed in divine things through divine revelation. Therefore, over and beyond the philosophical disciplines discovered by human reason, it was necessary that a sacred doctrine be had through revelation.

Reply to objection 1: Even if man should not inquire through human reason into things that are too high for human cognition, such things should nonetheless be accepted through faith when they are revealed by God. This is why in the same place it is added, “For many things are shown to you above the understanding of men.” Sacred doctrine consists in things of this sort.

Reply to objection 2: Diverse conceptual characteristics (*ratio cognoscibilis*) make for diverse sciences. For instance, the astronomer and the natural philosopher demonstrate the same conclusion, viz., that the earth is round. But the astronomer does this through a mathematical middle term—i.e., a middle term abstracted from matter—whereas the natural philosopher does it through a middle term considered materially. Hence, nothing prevents it from being the case that the same things that the philosophical disciplines treat insofar as they are knowable by the light of natural reason should be treated by another science insofar as they are known by the light of divine revelation. Hence, the theology associated with sacred doctrine differs in kind from the theology that is posited as a part of philosophy.

Article 2 **Is sacred doctrine a science?**

It seems that sacred doctrine is not a science.

Objection 1: Every science proceeds from first principles that are known per se. But sacred doctrine proceeds from the articles of the Faith, which are not known per se, since they are not conceded by everyone; for as 2 Thessalonians 3:2 puts it, “Not everyone has faith.” Therefore sacred doctrine is not a science.

Objection 2: A science is not about singular things. But sacred doctrine treats of singular things—e.g., the deeds of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc. Therefore, sacred doctrine is not a science.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 14 Augustine says: “Only this science has the means by which saving faith is begotten, nourished, defended, and strengthened.” But this pertains to no science except sacred doctrine. Therefore, sacred doctrine is a science.

I respond: Sacred doctrine is a science. But notice that there are two kinds of science. Some sciences, e.g., arithmetic, geometry, etc., proceed from first principles known by the natural light of the intellect. By contrast, other sciences proceed from first principles known by the light of a higher science. For instance, the science of perspective proceeds from first principles made known through geometry, and the science of music proceeds from first principles made known through arithmetic. It is in this second way that sacred doctrine is a science. For it proceeds from first principles known by the light of a higher science, viz., the science had by God and the blessed in heaven. So just as music takes on faith the principles handed down to it by arithmetic, so too sacred doctrine takes on faith the principles revealed to it by God.

Reply to objection 1: The first principles of a science are either known per se or else traced back to the knowledge that belongs to a higher science. As was just explained, the first principles of sacred doctrine are of the latter type.

Reply to objection 2: Sacred doctrine treats singular things not because it deals with them principally, but because they are introduced as examples for living, as in the moral sciences, and also because they make clear the authority of those men through whom the divine revelation that grounds Sacred Scripture and sacred doctrine has come down to us.