A spiritual guide to the harmony between faith and reason in times of intellectual darkness

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I. Introduction: When Faith Illuminated Reason

The history of humanity is a constant search for truth. Throughout the centuries, men and women have tried to answer the great questions: Who are we? Where do we come from? Where are we going? In that journey, two paths have often crossed: that of reason and that of faith.

In the Middle Ages, when Europe was struggling with ignorance, political chaos, and moral decay after the fall of the Roman Empire, a spiritual and intellectual movement arose that not only changed the course of Western thought but **saved human reason itself** from shipwreck. That movement was **Scholasticism**. And its unexpected protagonist was a pagan philosopher from the 4th century B.C.: **Aristotle**.

This article is not a philosophy class, but an invitation to rediscover how God, in His providence, has used even pagans to build His Church. And how Scholastic thought, especially that of **St. Thomas Aquinas**, can help us today, in the 21st century, to rediscover the beauty of thinking logically, loving with the heart, and believing with coherence.

II. What is Scholasticism?

Scholasticism was a method of teaching and thinking that flourished in cathedral schools and medieval universities, especially between the 11th and 14th centuries. Its goal was to harmonize **revealed faith** with **natural reason**, using the tools of philosophy—especially logic and metaphysics—to better understand the truths of the faith.

The term “scholastic” comes from the Latin *scholasticus*, meaning “of the school.” But these weren’t schools as we know them today. They were vibrant centers of discussion, prayer, and the search for truth. The scholastics were not content to repeat dogmas; they wanted to **understand** them. They started from the conviction that *veritas est una*: **truth is one**, and cannot contradict itself.

> *“The wisdom of the prudent is to discern their way” (Proverbs 14:8)*

III. Aristotle: The Unexpected Philosopher

Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) was a disciple of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. His thought spanned from logic to ethics, politics, metaphysics, and biology. His genius lay in observing the real world, starting from concrete experience, and building a coherent system to explain the causes and purposes of everything that exists.

For centuries, Christian thought had been more **Platonic** than **Aristotelian**, influenced especially by **St. Augustine**. But starting in the 12th century, through Arabic and Hebrew translations into Latin, the works of Aristotle began to spread across Europe. And then came the great turning point: **St. Thomas Aquinas**, in the 13th century, took on the challenge of "baptizing" Aristotle, integrating his thought into a profoundly Christian worldview.

IV. St. Thomas Aquinas and the Perfect Synthesis

Born in 1225, **St. Thomas Aquinas** was a Dominican friar—silent, humble, deeply prayerful, and extraordinarily intelligent. In his magnum opus, the *Summa Theologica*, he achieved a synthesis that still amazes for its clarity, depth, and balance.

Thomas saw no contradiction between **human reason** (represented by Aristotle) and **revealed faith** (transmitted by the Church). On the contrary, he taught that:

- Reason can know natural truths (such as the existence of God, moral law, and the purpose of man).
- Faith reveals supernatural truths (such as the Trinity, the Incarnation, and grace).
- Both truths come from the same God and therefore **cannot contradict each other**.

This vision is summed up in one of Thomas's famous phrases:

> *"Grace does not destroy nature but perfects it."*

Thanks to Scholasticism, the Church was able to present a **reasonable Christianity**, coherent and capable of dialoguing with the world without compromising the truth. Faith

stopped seeming irrational, and reason stopped being an enemy of God.

V. Why Do We Say Scholasticism Saved Reason?

Because at a time when thought was fragmented, when superstition replaced knowledge, and when Christianity was under attack from heresies or reduced to soulless formulas, the scholastics restored **dignity to human thought**.

They taught that:

- **To believe is not to close your eyes, but to open them wider**.
- **To think well is an act of charity**, because it allows us to know God better.
- **Study can be prayer**, if done with humility and a desire for truth.
- The human intellect, though wounded by sin, **remains the image of God**.

Scholasticism not only saved reason from medieval irrationalism but also **protected it from fideism and voluntarism**, which would come later.

VI. Contemporary Relevance: What Does Aristotle Have to Do with Me?

It may seem like this is for theologians or historians, but the truth is that **the battle between reason and faith is still alive today**. We live in an age of contradictions:

- On one side, a **scientism** that reduces truth to what can be empirically proven.
- On the other, a **sentimental relativism** that denies any objective truth.
- And in the middle, many Christians who feel they must **choose between believing and thinking**, as if they were enemies.

Here’s where Scholasticism becomes light once again. Because it teaches us to **think clearly**, to distinguish, to reason, to argue without fanaticism or emotivism. Because it shows us that **faith is not irrational**, and that loving God with all our heart includes loving Him **with all our mind** (cf. Mt 22:37).

VII. Practical Applications: How to Live Scholasticism Today

It's not about reading the *Summa Theologica* in Latin (although that wouldn't hurt), but about **adopting the scholastic spirit** in our daily lives. How?

1. **Seek Truth with Humility**

Don't assume we know everything. Be willing to learn. Ask "why." Don't settle for easy or emotional answers.

2. **Study with Spiritual Purpose**

Study isn't just for passing exams or winning debates, but to **know God better** and His will. Every book read, every argument understood, can be an act of love for the Truth.

3. **Avoid Fideism and Rationalism**

Neither reason alone nor faith alone. Both must go hand in hand. If something seems to contradict the faith, investigate more—don't stop thinking. If something seems to contradict reason, ask God for light—don't reject the faith.

4. **Form Ourselves Doctrinally**

As Catholics, we need to know the Catechism, the encyclicals, the Church's tradition. Ignorance is not a virtue. As St. Jerome said: "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ."

5. **Educate Our Children in Logic and Faith**

Education should form **thinking minds and believing hearts**. Logic is not an enemy of piety. In fact, a well-made prayer requires clarity of thought and uprightness of soul.

VIII. A Pastoral Word: Saving the Soul Also with the Intellect

In times when emotions dominate, when influencers dictate how we think, and when we are told to "feel good" rather than "live in the truth," Scholasticism reminds us that **God not only wants your heart, He also wants your mind**.

> *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God" (Romans 12:2)*

This is not an invitation to cold intellectualism, but to a **mature spirituality**, one that thinks, discerns, argues, dialogues, loves the truth, and seeks it with passion.

IX. Conclusion: Aristotle on the Altar, Reason Kneeling Before the Truth

It may sound provocative to say that Aristotle has been placed on the altar. But in a certain sense, it is true. Not as an object of worship, but as a witness that **all truth, wherever it comes from, belongs to God**.

St. Thomas knew how to place reason at the service of faith. And by doing so, he showed us a path that is still valid today: **to think in order to believe better, and to believe in order to love more**.

May Scholasticism not remain locked in libraries. May it be reborn in our classrooms, our parishes, our homes. Let us be thinking, reasonable, coherent Catholics. And like St. Thomas, may we one day say:

> *"All that I have written seems like straw to me… compared with the love of Christ."*

May Mary, Seat of Wisdom, intercede for us. And may the Holy Spirit, author of all truth, enlighten our minds and strengthen our faith.