

- Topic: Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives—
New Insights into the Catholic Scholastic Tradition?
- Convener: Francis X. Clooney, Boston College
- Presenter: José I. Cabezón, Iliff School of Theology
- Respondents: Lois Malcolm, Luther College
Thomas P. Rausch, Loyola Marymount University
David Williams, Boston College

Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives, edited by José I. Cabezón, is a collection of nine essays which are the fruit of a project (begun in 1993) exploring "scholasticism" as a mode of religious learning and set of (realist) conclusions about the world operative in numerous religious traditions, well beyond the medieval Christian West normally associated with the term. This CTSA select group considered *Scholasticism* specifically in the context of Catholic theology. Beginning with the general premise that comparative theological study aids us in seeing and appropriating in new ways elements familiar from our own Catholic tradition, the panel asked how *Scholasticism*, insofar as it successfully establishes scholasticism as a comparative category, might contribute to a Christian retrieval of Christian scholasticism in a way that is respectful of tradition, cognizant of religious and theological diversity, and able to contribute to the continuing development of Catholic theological method and even doctrine.

As explained by José Cabezón in his opening presentation, *Scholasticism* begins with two key essays. The first (by Cabezón himself) sets up the problem and proposes eight formal features of scholasticism: (1) a strong sense of tradition; (2) a concern for language and exegesis; (3) proliferativity, the tendency toward textual and analytic inclusivity rather than exclusivity; (4) the ideal of completeness of system balanced by maximal compactness; (5) confidence in the accessibility of the world to reasonable inquiry; (6) systematicity, order in exposition; (7) a commitment to reasoned argument and noncontradiction; (8) self-reflexivity, the tendency to objectify and analyze first-order practices. The second introductory essay (by Louis Roy) identifies scholasticism's key characteristics as developed in the medieval Latin tradition and exemplified by the writings of Albert the Great; it also reminds readers of the comparative aspects of this "original" scholasticism, articulated in the midst of the great dialogue of the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim traditions. Subsequent essays judiciously explore likely examples of scholastic thinking in the Islamic, Tibetan Buddhist, Jewish, Taoist, Neo-Confucian, and Hindu traditions. A concluding essay asks whether a revival of scholasticism, understood as rooted in specific traditions and yet also operative across traditional boundaries, is possible today as a useful corrective to modes of scholarship alienated from the virtues of religious learning and reading.

All three respondents expressed appreciation of the volume's overall project and its facility in moving back and forth between general features and particular examples, and in presenting non-Christian materials in an accessible form, and

then each moved on to points of specific concern. David Williams highlighted the distinction (noted in several essays) between performative and intellectualist scholasticisms, and the importance of the practical formative process in "the schools." Recognizing the interrelation between theologies of creation and revelation which underlie much of the Christian theological interest in the wider world, he then asked about the religious rationale for wider interest among scholastics in other religions. Finally, Williams reflected on the balance between the category of proliferativity as a strongly intellectual impetus and the more practical factor of the compulsion of circumstances, by which traditions had to explain and defend in a public forum views which might otherwise have gone unscrutinized.

Lois Malcolm too drew attention to the pedagogical and formative aspects of scholasticism—the work of schools—and raised the possibility of comparative reflection on religious learning in the various traditions. She also noted the fruitfulness of a scholastic approach which resists the temptation to reduce doctrinal knowledge to religious experience, yet without losing respect for experience. Finally, she introduced some considerations on scholasticism in the Protestant traditions, and thus showed yet again how a comparative perspective—e.g., looking toward Tibet—can unexpectedly enhance understanding within the Christian tradition itself, as we learn to see scholasticism no longer defined as an exclusively Catholic phenomenon, but also Protestant (and Orthodox).

Thomas Rausch located reflection on scholasticism in the context of the contemporary face-off between religious fundamentalisms who are uncomfortable with critical inquiry, and secular academic discourse, which is at a loss with respect to the project of an intelligent study of religious issues that respects faith as well as reason. Scholasticism then turns out to have some unexpected and timely virtues, particularly its ability to examine sacred scriptures and revered traditions critically and with a certain firm grasp on objectivity that nevertheless does not undercut faith. Even so, Rausch admits, this new scholasticism might also unsettle traditional religious cultures as it vigorously draws them into dialogue with modern thought, and thus exposes them to new intellectual challenges which cannot, by scholastic standards, be dismissed merely on religious grounds.

The ensuing discussion (which lasted a half-hour beyond the scheduled conclusion time) was a lively, strikingly vital, and interesting exploration of scholasticism in the Catholic, Protestant, and even "modern Enlightenment" traditions. Further fruitful areas of research were identified. These can build on this volume's contributions as theologians learn to explore the learned theologies of other religious traditions, and consequently look anew into less noticed, or overly familiar areas, of Christian theology itself.

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