

# A Theology Textbook Based on Zubiri's Philosophy and Theological Writings

## *Editorial*

What is the purpose of life? How do we know about God? Why do people sin? What is sin? Why would God choose to redeem men? What is evil? How should one live in the world? What are our responsibilities to others, to nature, to God? What is the nature of truth, and how do other truths and other knowledge about the world mesh with faith? These and many other questions have intrigued, vexed, and mystified people for millennia. They call for answers, and these answers are provided by that branch of knowledge we call *theology*. Zubiri also realized the importance of these questions, and wrote extensively on theological topics.

Zubiri recognized that any theology, to be relevant and compelling, must start from humanity's current state of knowledge, the situation of belief that is common, the general attitude toward religion prevalent, and the psychological state of the epoch. This means that it must be grounded in experiences, knowledge, and belief that are fundamental, widely accepted, and beyond question. But it does not mean that the answers are relative, or that truth is relative; only that theology must speak to each epoch in ways that it can understand. St. Augustine (354-430) did this for the ancient world, taking into account pagan knowledge, the situation of the late Roman Empire, and the attitudes of the people of that time. His famous *Dei Civitate Dei*, or *City of God* (c. 415), written in the context of the sack of Rome in 410 by the Visigoths, sought to teach readers that Divine goals, not human empires, are what is most important. It is a testament to the greatness of Augustine that his writings, and Augustinian spirituality, continue to have great influence even today. St. Augustine was heavily influenced by Platonic thought, and through him (and many others) Platonic ideas permeated Christian theology.

Among the first and in many ways the greatest effort to create a systematic theology in the West was St. Thomas Aquinas' (1225-1274) *Summa Theologica*, left unfinished at his death. It was written partly in response to a crisis in Christian theology, brought about by the reintroduction of Aristotelian thought into Medieval Europe from the Islamic world. Aristotle represented an apparently complete, secular form of knowledge that competed with, and seemed to contradict in many ways, the established version of Christian theology, which at that time utilized primarily elements of Platonic thought. St. Thomas sought to integrate Aristotelian knowledge with Christian thought, tradition, and scripture, and thereby created a comprehensive new systematic theology which has endured and inspired for more than seven hundred years. He starts from the general situation prevalent at the time, which was a belief in the God of Abraham (whether from the Muslim, Jewish, or Christian traditions). He also grounds his work on what was widely considered the foundation of all knowledge at that time, namely Aristotle's metaphysics. St. Thomas had a profound grasp of Aristotle, the Bible, many of the Fathers, and the general knowledge of the time, which made his synthesis especially compelling.

But much has changed in the last 750 years: Aristotle is no longer the unquestioned source that he once was; a new type of knowledge has emerged that scarcely existed in St. Thomas' time, namely empirical science; the world does not so universally acknowledge the God of Abraham; and the exposition style used by St. Thomas, characteristic of debate in the Middle Ages, is quite foreign to modern discourse. Moreover, Protestantism and other forms of religious expression not known in the Middle Ages are

now part of everyday life, as are political systems such as modern industrial representative democracy. To be sure, there are advocates of Thomism who seek to modernize St. Thomas' thought, and harmonize it with today's world and developments since the time of St. Thomas. These efforts were spearheaded in the 20th century by profound thinkers such as Étienne Gilson (1884-1978) and Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), among others.

Nonetheless Zubiri believes that all such efforts to ground theology, however well-intentioned, are ultimately doomed to failure because of fundamental errors in the metaphysical underpinning of Thomistic philosophy, going back to Aristotle. At the deepest level, the problem centers on the ability of rational thought to capture reality and serve as our primary mode of access to it. If the Greeks made a serious mistake, it was their belief the human reason, by thought alone, could arrive at truth. This has been corrected to a considerable degree by modern experimental science, but not entirely: the belief still persists that rational activity—mainly science—is the only path to reality. For Zubiri, this error, which he refers to as the logification of knowing, must be also be corrected before any new systematic theology can be erected. Of course, this does not mean that all previous theology is wrong and must be discarded; rather it implies that a new foundation for theology must be laid that does not rely upon weak or erroneous assumptions about knowledge and reality. Much of what was developed in the past will be retained and given a more solid grounding—Zubiri himself was very partial to the thought of the Eastern Church Fathers; on the other hand, some theological ideas perforce will be superceded.

For Zubiri, human knowing has a foundation that is prior to rational inquiry; and rational methods, though powerful, are unable to fully capture reality. His groundbreaking philosophical insights and their development in *Sentient Intelligence* as well as *On Essence* and *The Dynamic Structure of Reality* show that there is a need to completely rethink aspects of theology in order to take into account these insights. Zubiri himself did explore many issues in the theological trilogy *Man and God*, *The Philosophical Problem of the History of Religions*, and *Christianity*. Among other things, in those works he explains how the progression of theological knowledge begins with human experience (religation), not rational proofs of God's existence. Zubiri also wrote essays on particular topics, such as the Eucharist. What he did not do was to synthesize all of his works and combine them with traditional theology to create a new systematic theology.

As a result, the Xavier Zubiri Foundation of North America has set out to create such a systematization of Zubiri's theology, and write a theology text based on Zubiri's philosophy and theological writings. As this task is enormous—greater than any single person can accomplish—we have formed a small group of Zubiri experts, and are looking for others who may be interested in this project. In this issue two of the papers are examples of writing that will be in the proposed book: the essay on proofs of the existence of God, by Thomas Fowler, and the essay on the sources of Zubiri's theology, by Guillerma Díaz Muñoz. The book has been outlined, and several chapters exist in draft form. If you are interested in this project please contact Thomas Fowler, [tfowler@zubiri.org](mailto:tfowler@zubiri.org) for further information. We are looking for people to write chapters or assist with translation. We plan to publish the book in Spanish and English. The anticipated date for publication is 2015.

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