

B. Natural Theology

1. Historical statements of the doctrine

a. The view of Thomas Aquinas (A. D. 1225-1274)

In his *Summa Theologica*, Aquinas, following Aristotle's lead, argued that man's knowledge in this life is mediated through the senses; and whatever knowledge he has of divine things must be by inference from or by analogy with his knowledge of material things. It follows that what man can know about God by reason alone is strictly limited. He can know, as Aristotle showed, that there must exist a First Cause over nature, and he can know, by the "negative way" of abstracting from the imperfections of the creatures, something of the perfections of the Creator; but he cannot know anything of God's internal life, nor His purposes toward creation.

In his *Summa contra gentiles*, Thomas makes a distinction between essence and existence, and contends that only the existence of God is demonstrable. The proofs for the existence of God tell us only that nature presupposes the existence of a being that is perfect in precisely those respects in which nature is imperfect. At this point, faith steps forward and joins hands with reason, saying, "This is the one we call God." In Books One through Three, Thomas follows reason as far as it appears to lead; then closes each chapter with a scriptural quotation or a statement of faith from one of the doctors of the Church. But in Book Four he begins each chapter with the authorities and proceeds to expound the truth of revelation, and to cover those parts of the Christian faith that cannot be discovered by reason.

The relation, then between reason and faith is one of complementarity. Reason and revelation cannot conflict; and if reason seems to lead to conclusions contrary to revealed truth, some error is present in the reasoning process. Reason and faith are separate ways of knowing God, each disclosing something of Him that is not given by the other.

Thomas Aquinas held that there were three levels of knowledge concerning God:

LEVEL	KIND OF TRUTH ATTAINABLE
I	Truths attainable by unaided human reason
II	Truths attainable by unaided human reason, but more easily and clearly attainable by revelation
III	Truths attainable by revelation alone