

METAPHYSICAL IDEAS AS A BASIS FOR UNDERSTANDING  
THE THEOLOGY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
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In order to explain the importance of the affirmation of real objective metaphysical ideas as a basis for understanding the theology of the Catholic Church, we first have to define what Metaphysics is. Metaphysics literally means "beyond Physics".

Once the unmoved mover is discovered at the end of Physics as the only possible final explanation for material change, then there is another science which must be the first science. The subject matter of Physics was material being as changeable. This is the first kind of being known by man because knowledge comes through the senses. It is through knowledge of material beings that man comes to understand that there must be beings which are not physical. They are without matter or immaterial and so are beyond the material and thus are meta-physical. Without beings which do not depend on matter to exist or to be understood there would be no science of metaphysics.<sup>1</sup>



It is important to understand that if there are no real metaphysical ideas, and then God doesn't exist. Because God is not a physical reality; God has no body, nor is God limited by space and time. We, as Catholics know, by the faith which has been revealed to us that God does exist, which is a truth that can also be proven in nature by just contemplating everything around us (such as the trees, the sky, the moon, the stars, the oceans, etc) which were all created by God.

Therefore, to understand the theology of the Catholic Church, we must comprehend the seriousness of accepting these real objective metaphysical ideas; otherwise, our faith would not make any sense, because without any objective metaphysical ideas, then there is no God. And, this would be totally against our Catholic beliefs. Furthermore, we, as Catholics believe that there is only One God, the Almighty, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, of all that is visible and invisible (which used to be of all that is seen and unseen), which clearly states that God does exist and that He is the Creator of the entire universe. This, creation, of course, includes all the physical and non-physical realities. God, for example, is not physical, but metaphysical - beyond the physical. Beauty, Truth, Goodness, are also examples of other metaphysical ideas.

Relying on Romans 1:19-20, St. Thomas holds that men can, from the visible things of this world, come to the knowledge of the invisible things of God. This means that the world provides evidence for the existence of God.<sup>2</sup>

In the Sixth Lesson of our lectures, we learned that the First Philosophers were looking for what the meaning was of the things they had experienced. They were not looking for God.

However, this searching led them to the fact that there is the existence of this unmoved mover who could not Himself suffered change, who also had to be spiritual, therefore, personal, who was then the kind of being that we can only define analogically in this world. This pointed out that Physics was not in fact the first Philosophy, that there must be a Philosophy beyond Physics that presupposed Physics but which treated of beings which were much more spiritual and much deeper. In other words, beings that did not depend upon matter for either their existence or for our knowledge of them in the sense of our definition of them. This science, of course, was Metaphysics.<sup>3</sup>

We also studied from our lectures, that the Church has always held together with Saint Paul, that it is through the visible things of this world that we are led to discover the invisible things of God. As a result, the Church, the Scriptures, and many of the Church Fathers, including Saint Thomas Aquinas were clear, and as Father Mullady so clearly explained in his lecture notes, both Vatican I and Vatican II back this up as well, that through nature it was possible to discover the existence of God.

This is exactly what happened to the First Philosophers, they were not looking for God, but in their search for the truth, found Him. And, once, this spiritual being (God) was discovered, and then they knew that there must be a more primary science than the science of Physics, something that goes beyond Physics, or Metaphysics.

And, the affirmation of there been an objective metaphysics is basically what sets the Philosophy that Catholicism has always accepted as her own apart from other Philosophies in this world.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, the Church has always taught that we need to use our reason in order to understand the tenets of our faith (those which can be understood), therefore, it would be wise to conclude that we would also need to believe in the metaphysical ideas presented to us in the study of Philosophy, in order to sustain what we believe. Otherwise, we will fall into some kind of relativism. And, clearly we can see this today, in the world around us. Many people would assert that it is the same to believe that God does exist and to believe that He does not exist. This, of course, is relativism and is absurd.

In like manner, we can see how the lack of metaphysics in various modern philosophers beginning with Rene Descartes (also known as the Father of Modern Philosophy), has influenced today's mentality and have played a major role in today's society. He doubted everything; he even doubted his own existence. He thought and because he thought, he therefore concluded he existed.

Isaac Newton was following Descartes who believed it was possible for the mind to deduce all of knowledge from a few abstract principles which were based on the mathematical certitude applied to finding the perfect mechanism. Newton wanted like Descartes to reduce all reality to a few principles.<sup>5</sup>

Some of these modern philosophers (although not all of them) longed for mathematical certainty in knowledge, especially Descartes. This is why He struggled with metaphysics.

The great watershed in modern thinking was Immanuel Kant who unified the worse aspects of the rationalists and the romantics and still influences thinking today. The day he read Hume's book was the most significant in his life. He agreed with him about the impossibility of universal objective metaphysical truths through sense experience, a teaching he explains in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. But being a pious German Lutheran he was convinced there must be metaphysical truths like laws and God. He therefore reformed thinking and for the first time formally denied that truth was the correspondence of the mind to the thing. In other words, there is no truth to be found in the objective experience of things.<sup>6</sup>

Other examples are Aristotle and Saint Thomas Aquinas who believed in the union of body and soul. The soul as the form of the body. In other words, they were related to each other. Descartes rejected their belief and said that the soul had no relation to the body. And, referred to the human soul as the "the ghost in the machine" - the ghost being the soul and the machine being the body. He understood it as two different types of realities which had no connection to each other. And, most modern philosophers struggled with this soul-body relationship as well. However, the Theology of the Catholic faith has usually worked in relationship to a particular philosophical model, which it has used to interpret our faith. They go hand in hand. Therefore, to conclude, as to why the affirmation or confirmation that there are real objective metaphysical ideas is so important as a basis for understanding the theology of the Catholic Church, we have to say, that it is because it is the starting point (or point of departure) of our faith. If we don't have these metaphysical ideas, then God doesn't exist, and if God doesn't exist, then neither do we. To think this would be unreasonable and ludicrous.

The truth is that God does exist, and because He exists, He created all of us, this includes all physical and non-physical realities. Not because God needed to create us, the reality is God does not need us. We, on the other hand, do need God in our lives.

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<sup>1</sup>Mullady O.P., Fr. Brian. "Notes from Lecture 7: Philosophy for Theologians". (Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles College & Seminary).

<sup>2</sup>McInerny, Ralph, *St. Thomas Aquinas* (University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame Press, Indiana, 2004), 154

<sup>3</sup>Mullady O.P., Fr. Brian. "Notes from Lecture 6: Philosophy for Theologians". (Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles College & Seminary).

<sup>4</sup>Mullady O.P., Fr. Brian. "Notes from Lecture 6: Philosophy for Theologians". (Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles College & Seminary).

<sup>5</sup>Mullady O.P., Fr. Brian. "Notes from Lecture 4: Philosophy for Theologians". (Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles College & Seminary).

<sup>6</sup>Mullady O.P., Fr. Brian. "Notes from Lecture 4: Philosophy for Theologians". (Cromwell, CT: Holy Apostles College & Seminary).

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