



*Three*

## FORMING THE HUMANIST SYNTHESIS

**THOMAS AQUINAS | AD 1225 - 1274**

**A**s we consider the causes and processes that brought about the slow and steady 800-year erosion of the Christian faith in Italy, Germany, France, England, Scotland, and America, we must start with the first universities where the great humanist incursion began. The University of Bologna commenced its work in 1088. By the 1270s, there were universities at Paris, Orleans, Toulouse, Montpellier, Cambridge, Oxford, Padua, Bologna, Naples, Salerno, Salamanca, Coimbra, and Lisbon. These academic institutions were established on humanist ideas that served as the foundation for the Humanist Renaissance. For a thousand years previous, the church had generally followed the education model propounded by Christ. It was the old, humble “University of Jesus from Nazareth”—more sandals and walking sticks than pin-striped suits and airy lecture halls. It was more love of the brethren than love of books. It was more kingdom of God than empires of men. It was more Old Testament law than Aristotelian ethics. It was more prayer and parables

than podiums and prose. It was more discipleship than education. It was no mere coincidence that these universities formed in concert with the development of the Holy Roman Empire; there was an unholy alliance between an increasingly power-oriented church and a power-consumed state. Eventually, the humanist state would overpower the church. In the 12th century, the universities revived the humanist thinking of the Greeks and Romans creating the new synthesis of humanist thought and Christian thought. Initially, a strong element of the Christian church resisted this movement, and that is where Thomas Aquinas comes into play.

Immediately, some will take offense at the inclusion of Aquinas in a book on apostates. He is still regarded as a great hero to many Catholics and Protestants alike. Even those who consider themselves Reformed out of respect for the Protestant Reformation are enthusiastic about Aquinas' work. But before this whole treatise is dismissed out of hand, I need to make several important qualifications. First, we have very little information about Aquinas' personal life, and for this reason I am hesitant to call him an "apostate." Also, the famous statement he made to his friend Reginald of Piperno shortly before he died is highly significant: Thomas said, "All that I have written seems like straw to me (*mihi videtur ut palea*)." There is no record of the Apostles commenting on their own work in this manner; nor did Augustine, Justin Martyr, Clement, Irenaeus, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and hundreds of other important contributors to the church of Christ over the centuries speak of their work in this way. Some may pass Aquinas' comment off as self-effacing humility, but I believe that it was more than that. Aquinas himself must have identified something of an "Achille's heel" in his work, and he felt it important to warn others about it. Whatever the case, thousands of institutions and billions of people did not consider Aquinas' philosophy to be the straw he declared it to be. Quite the contrary, they proceeded to develop their universities, seminaries, philosophies, and apologetic methods upon his epistemological framework.

I trust that God showed mercy to this man in his humility. Who among us has not included a little error here and there in his work? Without question, Thomas wrote many good things. He defended the orthodox Trinitarian faith and retained a strong God-centeredness in his metaphysics. Yet, Aquinas' work was deeply flawed. If we compared his teachings to a skyscraper with a hundred floors, then much of the building may have been in pretty good shape. Nonetheless, there is a serious flaw discovered within the foundations. In fact, one of the most important footers in his worldview

representing his theory of knowledge, was fundamentally defective, as I shall demonstrate in this chapter. If the foundation was compromised, the building was doomed from the beginning. That is why we must start with Thomas Aquinas in our consideration of the philosophers who have formed the mind of the Western world (between AD 1300 and AD 2000).

Thomas Aquinas, was the intermediary link between the old Christian Europe and the increasingly secularized, humanist Western world. During Thomas' life, there was great tension between the conservative faction of the church and the new humanism that was creeping into the medieval church. As a Dominican priest, Thomas took it upon himself to counteract the growing fear of the Aristotelian ideologies, and to resolve the tension developing between the secular university and the church. Gifted with a tremendous mind, Thomas set out to create a comfortable synthesis between humanist philosophy and God-sourced revelatory truth. Between 1270 and 1272, he produced a series of disputations to address this, including *De virtutibus in communi* (*On Virtues in General*), *De virtutibus cardinalibus* (*On Cardinal Virtues*), and *De spe* (*On Hope*).

## INFLUENCE

Thomas Aquinas had an extraordinary influence on the Western church. Even though it has been over 750 years since his death, most Christian academic leaders speak of him in glowing terms. One evangelical college professor writes, "Thomas Aquinas is a phenomenal gift to the entire church... here is a mind that was Catholic enough to embrace any good idea from wherever it came."<sup>1</sup> Peter Kreeft, professor of philosophy at the evangelical King's College writes, "I am totally convinced that Saint Thomas Aquinas was the greatest, wisest, most intelligent merely human theologian who ever lived."<sup>2</sup> Remarkable testimonies indeed, if the list of "mere human theologians" included men like the Apostle Paul, John Calvin, and Augustine!

The Roman Catholics share a similar view of Aquinas as do various evangelical, protestant doctors of philosophy. The Catholic Encyclopedia remarks, "Since the days of Aristotle, probably no one man has exercised such a powerful influence on the thinking world as did St. Thomas... An attempt to give names of Catholic writers who have expressed their

1. John Mark Reynolds, ed., *The Great Books Reader* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2011), 145.

2. Peter Kreeft, "The Truth of Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *The Great Books Reader*, 163.

appreciation of St. Thomas and of his influence would be an impossible undertaking; for the list would include nearly all who have written on philosophy or theology since the thirteenth century, as well as hundreds of writers on other subjects.”<sup>3</sup> What finer compliments have ever been used for mere men? The epistemological work of Aquinas and his systematization of the doctrines of merit, venial and mortal sins, etc. greatly influenced the future canons of the Roman church. The Roman Pontiff Innocent VI offered this commendation for Aquinas: “His teaching above that of others, the canons alone excepted, enjoys such an elegance of phraseology, a method of statement, a truth of proposition, that those who hold it are never found swerving from the path of truth, and he who dare assail it will always be suspected of error.”<sup>4</sup>

## PHILOSOPHY

Aquinas’ magnum opus is *Summa Theologiae*, a highly systematized theology. Again, much of his teaching may be helpful for the defense of an orthodox, Trinitarian faith. It is just that the first article was terribly flawed.

*“Now Scripture, inspired of God, is no part of philosophical science [knowledge], which has been built up by human reason. Therefore it is useful that besides philosophical science, there should be other knowledge, i.e. inspired of God. I answer that, it was necessary for man’s salvation that there should be a knowledge revealed by God besides philosophical science [knowledge] built up by human reason... Hence theology included in sacred doctrine differs in kind from that theology which is part of philosophy.”*<sup>5</sup>

Here, Aquinas proposed two systems of knowledge: the one sacred and the other secular (or philosophical). This broke away from the old Augustinian view of knowledge, summed up in the Latin phrase “*Credo ut intelligam*,” or, “believe in order to understand.”<sup>6</sup> Augustine would not separate his Christian faith from understanding. In his *Confessions*, Augustine wrote, “The mind needs to be enlightened by light from outside

3. “St. Thomas Aquinas” in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/144663b.html>

4. *Ibid.*

5. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Q1, A1, Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province.

6. Augustine, *Tractate on Gospel of John*, 29.6

itself, so that it can participate in truth, because it is not itself the nature of truth. You will light my lamp, Lord.”<sup>7</sup> Aquinas broke from this view when he proposed a second form of knowledge “different in kind” from that obtained in Scripture. The secular universities were now free to build their systems of knowledge entirely without the divine revelation of Scripture.

Importantly, Thomas Aquinas really believed that natural man in his fallen state could build a reliable system of philosophical knowledge on “human reason.” He did not believe that man’s reason was seriously tainted by the fall into sin. How does this comport with the Apostle Paul’s warning for the Christians up in Greece about the “vain and deceptive philosophies” taught by the Greeks (Col. 2:8)? It’s hard to believe that the Apostle Paul was as gaga over Aristotle as was this “great” teacher of the 13th century. In an attempt to reconcile the Scriptures with the rising humanist university, Aquinas turned into the great apologist for this Greek who took his best shot at building his philosophy on defective human reason.

This lends too much credence to man’s natural capacity to determine truth apart from God’s special revelation. From the beginning, man has always relied upon God’s verbal revelation for his ethical behavior. Immediately upon creating Adam, God spoke to him concerning His ethical requirements (Gen. 2:16-19). Then man’s fall into sin darkened his mind (Rom. 1:21), and he could not receive the things of God (1 Cor. 2:14). From then on, the natural man’s reason has been clouded by layers upon layers of demonic deception (2 Cor. 4:4), and he is incapable of providing a solid basis for truth and ethics by his own reasoning capabilities. While he remains unaided by God’s divine revelation and God’s Spirit, in a fundamental sense he will think wrongly about everything. Man’s need for God’s direct and special revelation is *even more vital* after the fall.

However, it is nigh impossible to completely expunge all Christian ideas from an unbeliever’s thought processes because he operates in a world saturated in 2,000 years of Christian culture, calendars, law, and teaching. Therefore, he may still borrow some truthful presuppositions linked to divine revelation that originated with Noah or Moses or Christ. But his essential worldview is permanently skewed—short of the grace of God illuminating his mind by the Spirit and by the Word.

Despite Aquinas’ invitation to separate philosophical science from a biblical world and life view, many early Christians did not do so. Most—if

7. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 68.

not all—of the men who formed modern science (Isaac Newton, Robert Boyle, Louis Pasteur, Michael Faraday, etc.), were professing Christians who strongly held to a basically biblical metaphysic and ethic.

Contrary to what Aquinas taught, the Bible does not present two different kinds of thinking or knowledge (Prov. 2:1-6, Col. 2:1-3). There is only one source and one fountain of learning, and this is the Lord Jesus Christ. The Bible does present *two forms of revelation* in Psalm 19 and in Romans 1:18-22, but *not two different kinds of thinking, philosophy, or knowledge*. It is true that “the invisible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly seen being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead.” These two forms of revelation are vital for faith and life. Though men are given a law of sorts written on their hearts, Paul reminds us that they deceive themselves and suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18, 21, 22); they become vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart is darkened. Moreover, the source of knowledge that comes by way of this natural revelation is *not* human reason. For *God* has shown it unto them according to verse 19, so it is clear that God is the source of this knowledge as well. Therefore, the Bible would never commend a philosophy that was not rooted in divine revelation but rather assembled purely by man’s reason, as Aquinas proposes. There may be various forms of revelation, but the source of all knowledge is God Himself.

It is instructive that Aquinas includes reference to the fear of God (as the beginning of knowledge) only in the section in the Summa on ethics. Search as we might, there seems to be no requirement for the fear of God when it comes to the pursuit of philosophical knowledge built up on human reason. If the fear of God is essential to a Christian theory of knowledge, you would hope to find some mention of it in a Christian theologian’s treatment of the subject.

While Aquinas does retain something of a “veto power” for divine revelation, philosophy is left very much alone to develop its own infrastructure of knowledge independent of sacred doctrine. Christian theologian John Frame recognizes this to become an “enormous problem” for Aquinas and his successors.<sup>8</sup> Frame writes, “For the realm of ‘nature’ is, for Aquinas, essentially a realm in which autonomous reason (the reason that Aristotle advocated) is relatively unhindered... And since Aquinas

8. John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2015), 146.

even develops his doctrine of God out of natural reason...he is not able to insulate his theology, even his discipline of 'sacred doctrine,' from the effects of would-be autonomous thought."<sup>9</sup> As the Western world passes through this post-Christian period, it is promising to see more Christian thinkers questioning the underpinnings of Thomas' epistemology. As Nancy Pearcey describes Aquinas' "two-tiered" epistemological schema, she concludes that it must be "unstable." She notes that "the two orders of existence had a tendency to separate and grow increasingly independent... because there was no real interactions or inter-dependence between them... Aristotelian 'nature' remained complete and sufficient in itself, with grace merely an external add-on. No matter how much icing you spread on a cake, it is still a separate substance."<sup>10</sup>

Using stronger language than this author might wish to employ, Martin Luther described Aquinas as "the fountain and original soup of all heresy, error and Gospel havoc, as his books bear witness." Luther compared Aquinas with "the star of the book of Revelations which fell from heaven," as well comparing, "the empty speculations of Aristotle to the smoke of the bottomless pit, the universities to the locusts, and Aristotle himself to his master Apollyon."<sup>11</sup>

Man's fallen reason is completely incapable of producing a system of knowledge unaided by God. Moreover, man's reason is not to be confused with natural revelation. Revelation provides knowledge content, and reason is merely a tool that determines the rightness or wrongness, truth or falsity of a proposition based upon what is already known (or accepted to be true). Natural reason cannot be the source of knowledge concerning God or anything else. Professor of Apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary, K. Scott Oliphant comments on Aquinas' over-optimistic view of man's reason: "The best that natural reason can do, since the fall, is to produce an idol, a god of our own imaginings."<sup>12</sup> Oliphant notes the devastating effects of Aquinas' epistemology on theology, quoting Thomas himself, "A small error at the beginning of something is a great one at the end."<sup>13</sup>

9. Ibid.

10. Nancy Pearcey, *Total Truth: Liberating Christianity from Its Cultural Captivity* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 80.

11. Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, 5:288.


12. K. Scott Oliphant, *Thomas Aquinas* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2017), 53.

13. Ibid., 119.

In the first few paragraphs of the *Summa*, Thomas Aquinas dealt a heavy blow to the Christian faith in the Western world. For the ensuing eight hundred years, Christians would disconnect mathematics, music, culture, and science from the worldview framework revealed in Holy Scripture. It wasn't long before the domain of "sacred" knowledge became smaller and smaller, and the field referred to as "philosophical" knowledge expanded to gargantuan proportions. When secular philosophy took ownership of epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, law, social theory, political theory, etc., it was not long before sacred doctrine was left with... well, almost nothing. In time, rational "Christians" would reject the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as unreasonable, since this doctrine did not make sense to the modern philosopher. Seminaries amalgamated into secular universities by borrowing their ideas and teaching methodologies, thus assuring the destruction of the Christian church to which they ministered. In effect, when Christians adopt a worldview built upon a foundation of human reason, at some point Scripture is incapable of speaking with ultimate authority on any matter whatsoever. This was the end result of Aquinas' innovation, some eight hundred years later.

The Man of Straw, Thomas Aquinas provided the epistemological juggernaut that paved the way for humanism and the ruin of the faith in Western society.



A portrait of René Descartes, a French philosopher, mathematician, and scientist. He is shown from the chest up, wearing a dark coat and a white ruffled collar. He has long, dark, wavy hair and a small mustache. The background is a soft, light gray.

✦ *Four*

## FORMING THE HUMANIST PHILOSOPHER

**RENÉ DESCARTES | AD 1596 - 1650**

In the 13th century, Thomas Aquinas proposed two distinct systems of knowledge: one which is revealed through sacred doctrine and the other built upon human reason. Four centuries later, the philosopher René Descartes accepted the proposition, dedicating his life to the search for the first principles that would form the building blocks for a humanist (man-centered) worldview apart from the use of Scripture. Technically, he never apostatized from the Roman Catholic Church. But he did set a hard and fast separation between his religious life and his philosophical life. He kept his “faith” neatly compartmentalized so that never the twain should meet. This happens constantly in our day when, for example, political leaders most acceptant of anti-Christian policies concerning abortion and homosexuality are members in good standing of Catholic or Protestant churches.

By definition, the term “apostasy” requires a previous allegiance to a church that commits to some ultimate authority. If the Christian faith

would be abandoned in the West, it could not happen by the leadership of some born-and-bred atheist. An apostasy of this magnitude could only begin with a churchman. But it also had to address epistemological foundations, and this was Descartes' area of focus. What could possibly bring down the towering influence of the Christian faith in the Western world, but an attack on the foundations? It would take a distinctively humanist worldview approach to the theory of knowledge itself.

Unquestionably, René Descartes was a giant in the development of modern philosophy, a true original source of humanist thinking for the West. He lived in the Netherlands for most of his adult life, though he did not accept the biblical, Reformation thinking that defined 17th-century Holland. In fact, Blaise Pascal, a contemporary mathematician and thinker, said of him, "I cannot forgive Descartes; in all his philosophy, he would have been quite willing to dispense with God. But he had to make Him give a flick of his lordly fingers; beyond this, he has no further need of God."<sup>1</sup>

Descartes' mother died when he was only one year old. His father encouraged him to study law, but he rejected this advice in pursuit of a "higher calling." He embarked on a journey to reinvent knowledge. He wrote, "I entirely abandoned the study of letters. Resolving to seek no knowledge other than that of which could be found in myself or else in the great book of the world, I spent the rest of my youth traveling, visiting courts and armies, mixing with people of diverse temperaments and ranks, gathering various experiences, testing myself in the situations which fortune offered me, and at all times reflecting upon whatever came my way so as to derive some profit from it."<sup>2</sup>

## MORAL CHARACTER

In 1634, at 38 years of age, René Descartes committed fornication with a servant girl named Helena Jans van der Strom, while he lodged with his friend Thomas Sargeant in Amsterdam. He did not marry the girl, though he did take care of their illegitimate daughter who was born as a result. Descartes' lifestyle of fornication was extremely unusual for the 17th century. Records obtained from parishes in Protestant countries from that

1. Blaise Pascal, *Pensees* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1958), 23.

2. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. Cottingham, Stoothoff, Murdoch (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1:115.

period indicate that illegitimacy rates were only 0.69%.<sup>3</sup> Incredible though it seems, these conditions could only exist before humanists destroyed both morality and the family in the Western world, which elevated illegitimacy rates above 60% in some nations. The Bible takes the sin of fornication very seriously; but it is not certain that Descartes took it this way, as we can find no indication of remorse concerning his behavior in his writings.

*“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” (Rev. 21:8)*

It is truly remarkable that the great father of modern philosophy lacked such moral integrity. What would we say about influential Christian writers such as John Calvin, Thomas A’Kempis, Martin Luther, John Bunyan, and Jonathan Edwards if their ministries had been interrupted by a similar tragic incident of moral failure? Granted, there are godly men who fail, but their repentance is undeniably present in their writings. This was not true of Descartes, who as a humanist considered moral integrity unimportant. The fact that men fornicate with women and produce more orphans in the world is of little importance. To him, what really mattered is that the new ideas formulated were radical, human-centered, innovative, and autonomous—that is what makes a genius. In the centuries following, far more people followed the humanist epistemology of Descartes than, for example, the God-centered epistemology found in the first book of John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. “By their fruits ye shall know them.”

## INFLUENCE

An important philosopher in his own right (and major influence upon Karl Marx), G.W.F. Hegel spoke of Descartes as the pioneer in the development of philosophy in the modern age (after the fall of Rome).

*“René Descartes is a bold spirit who re-commenced the whole subject from the very beginning and constituted afresh the groundwork on which Philosophy*

3. Richard W. Price, “Bastardy or Illegitimacy in England,” in *Ancestral Trails*, (original edition and Tate’s *The Parish Chest*), <http://pricegen.com/resources/illegitimacy.htm>

*is based, and to which, after a thousand years had passed, it once more returned. The extent of the influence which this man exercised upon his times and the culture of Philosophy generally, cannot be sufficiently expressed.”<sup>4</sup>*

Descartes is commonly referred to as the “father of modern philosophy.”<sup>5</sup> The modern humanist is very much indebted to the work of this philosopher, as commonly referenced in modern college courses. “Descartes enthroned human reason as supreme authority in matters of knowledge...Infallibility now transferred from [the] authority of Scripture or Church Authority to human reason itself.”<sup>6</sup>

Descartes is arguably one of the first deists who began to envision a sharp separation between the created order and the spiritual reality of God. Although later empiricists like John Locke rejected the rationalism of René Descartes, Locke interacted with Descartes a great deal in his writings since each of them applied the same fundamental methodology in their thinking. Descartes can rightly be considered the pioneer in this form of humanism.

## DESCARTES’ PHILOSOPHY

In the autobiographical note above, we observe that Descartes’ quest for knowledge does not include the great book of Scripture containing God’s revealed truth. He resolves to seek “*no other knowledge*” than that found in himself and the “great book of the world.” The words “no other knowledge” are important; they are the fundamental credo of the humanist, since his quest for knowledge is a self-contained search. The humanist believes that man is sufficient of himself to determine truth. But the Christian worldview takes leave from Descartes at this point. To judge any proposition from a philosopher or magician who peeps and mutters, the believer must always return “to the law and to the testimony” to determine whether there is any light in the proposition (Is. 8:20). Only in God’s light, can we see light (Ps. 36:9). The source of truth is always Christ, the Son of God, who reveals the Father to man. Only Christ is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). There is no other fount of knowledge

4. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Chapter 1, A.1

5. Anthony Kenny, *The Rise of Modern Philosophy*, Vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 33.

6. Syllabus, *History of Modern Philosophy*, University of Hawaii, <http://www2.hawaii.edu/~freeman/courses/phil213/03.%20Descartes.pdf>

except Christ (Col. 2:3). So why doesn't Descartes consider Christ in his search for knowledge? That would be the simple question which Christian men like Augustine, A'Kempis, Calvin, and Paul would have liked to pose to this eminent philosopher.

Instead of beginning with Christ as the source of all knowledge, René Descartes accepts Thomas Aquinas' challenge to build his "philosophical knowledge" (as opposed to "sacred knowledge") upon human reason. There are usually two ways that this can be attempted. On the one hand, men may seek ultimate knowledge or first propositions within themselves, or they may try to find some truth outside of themselves and process the information in complete reliance on their own intellect. Descartes takes the first approach, attempting to find some incontrovertible truth within himself. *Independent of any and all revelation from God, while suspending all belief in God's existence, Descartes pretends that he can produce the first and most basic truths required to understand the world.*

His magnum opus begins with the "fact" that he doubts. Then after months of cogitating, he finally moves from "I doubt" to "I am thinking, therefore I exist."<sup>7</sup> But Descartes is not entirely honest in his reasoning. First, he assumes his own existence when he uses the word "I" in his first premise: "I doubt." He still continues to assume his existence before he gets to the business of doubting his own existence. Then he goes on to use the fact that he doubts, to prove his own existence. As he moves along in *The Discourse*, he attempts to "prove" the existence of his own physical body, and then on to "proving" the existence of God. Surely, God must have been relieved that Descartes has proved His existence. But the important thing to understand in *this* discussion is that Descartes' first and most fundamental truth is simply *his own thinking*. His second fundamental truth is his own existence. Then, finally he concludes that God exists.

Christians build their system of knowledge on much different foundations. We know that we cannot begin with the proposition of our own existence (or our own thinking, or our own doubting, for that matter), because "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (Prov. 1:7). We cannot begin to know anything with certainty without first assuming God's existence and fearing Him. It would be nothing less than cosmic treachery and ultimate intellectual rebellion to pretend that God did not exist while we go about proving our own existence (or anything

7. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 1:196.

else); for nothing could exist if God did not exist (Acts 17:28). What would Descartes or Aquinas say to this reasoning? Naturally, they would wholeheartedly agree that Proverbs 1:7 applies to the area of sacred doctrine, but not to philosophical knowledge built on human reason. What we have then is an irreconcilable difference between the teaching of the Bible and the reasoning of Descartes. According to the Bible, the most fundamental truth is God's existence, and any knowledge of God must be attended by the fear of God. The Christian understands that the first and most believable propositions are not those that "occur to us." The first and most believable proposition is that which God speaks. "Thy Word is truth", says Christ (John 17:17). However, according to Descartes, his own existence and his own doubting are more fundamental truths. He knows that he exists, however, he is not so sure about God's existence as yet. *At this very fine point of reasoning, the apostasy begins.*

Incredibly, Descartes begins with doubting or uncertainty as his fundamental belief, and then moves to certainty. Three centuries later, philosophers like John Dewey return to doubt and uncertainty, rooting their humanist worldview upon quicksand. How one can get to certainty from doubt is hard to fathom!

As Descartes builds up his philosophical knowledge on human reason, he cannot help but place the existence of God in the mix. If sacred doctrine constitutes a knowledge "different in kind" to that of philosophical knowledge, you would think that human reason would avoid this "existence-of-God business." But human reason is enthroned in Descartes' epistemology, and man's intellect must become the great judge concerning what is "believable" and "reasonable." The same humanist mindset that found the existence of God to be "reasonable" in the 17th century, would find the same thing "unreasonable" a century or two later. This is why Descartes' *Discourse on Method* was so dangerous. He was supposed to be working with *philosophical science*, not sacred doctrine. This philosophical science, according to Aquinas, "proceeds from self-evident principles." No doubt Aquinas would have been glad to see Descartes' attempt to create his philosophical science by his self-evident principles.

How does a person come to the knowledge of God, from the Christian worldview perspective? According to Scripture, it has nothing to do with Descartes establishing his own existence in his own mind. Knowing the Father has everything to do with the Son revealing the Father to men—"All things are delivered unto Me of My Father: and no man knoweth the Son,

but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him” (Matt. 11:27). This is the basis of knowledge for Christians, a far cry from that which René Descartes proposed.