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Comments about the relationship between Science and Faith in the Magisterium of the Church*

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ABSTRACT

The text analyzes the relationship between Science and Faith in the Magisterium of the Catholic Church. The analysis is based on the position of the Vatican Councils I and II about the importance of Faith and Reason for man, in his search for truth; simultaneously, the orientations of popes Leo XIII and John Paul II were taken into account, in their Encyclicals *Aeterni Patris* and *Fides et Ratio*, respectively; some speeches by Popes Paul VI, Benedict XVI and Francis before the Pontifical Academy of Sciences were also analyzed. The Church has sought - from the First Vatican Council to the present - to bring, harmonize and complement the relationship between Faith and Reason; its interest is not limited to promoting scientific research; it also aspires that knowledge be ordered to the welfare of the human being, and the horizon of faith is recognized in the search for truth.

KEY WORDS: Church; Science; Faith; Philosophy.

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Comentarios acerca de la relación entre Ciencia y Fe en el Magisterio de la Iglesia

RESUMEN

En el texto se analiza la relación entre Ciencia y Fe en el Magisterio de la Iglesia Católica. El análisis se fundamenta en la posición de los Concilios Vaticano I y II sobre la importancia de la Fe y la Razón para el hombre, en su búsqueda de la verdad; simultáneamente, se tomaron en cuenta las orientaciones de los papas León XIII y Juan Pablo II, en sus Encíclicas *Aeterni Patris* y *Fides et Ratio*, respectivamente; también fueron analizados algunos discursos de los papas Pablo VI, Benedicto XVI y Francisco ante la Pontificia Academia de las Ciencias. La Iglesia ha procurado -desde el Concilio Vaticano I hasta la actualidad-, acercar, armonizar y complementar la relación entre Fe y Razón; su interés no se agota en el fomento de la investigación científica; también aspira que el conocimiento se ordene al bienestar del ser humano, y se reconozca el horizonte de la fe en la búsqueda de la verdad.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Iglesia; Ciencia; Fe; Filosofía.

In the course of Modernity, the Church had to resist and at the same time give response to the secularization of the West, a conflict that in fact resulted in an order based on the primacy of the individual and the reason, contrary to Christian identity. of that world in which, progressively, was ignoring the principle of authority of the Church. Various events with a certain degree of interrelation, favored the introduction of secularism, among them: the Protestant reform, the revolutionary anticlericalism of the 18th century and the “rationalist exacerbation or secularization of logos” (Rivas García, 2013). This last aspect raised a distance between Christian Philosophy (Aristotelian scholasticism) and modern science (marked by the experimental method).

As a consequence of its positive evaluation of human reason -in its artistic and scientific expressions-, the Church tried in the 19th century to reduce the gap that had been interposed between the fields of metaphysical and phenomenal knowledge. The First Vatican Council, through the Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius* (April 24, 1870), laid the doctrinal and pastoral foundations in order to seek the convergence between Faith and

Reason, an aspiration that has been relevant in the Magisterium since then and up to the present.

The council fathers recognized a double order of knowledge that, although different, have in common the search for the truth. This latter, as a metaphysical notion, cannot be fully encompassed by Science, whose object is the sensible world. Consequently, it requires the help of the Faith for its full development. Both are understood as gifts that God grants to man, and therefore they cannot disagree with each other, or contradict each other; both are important and their healthy orientation consists in helping each other in the task of knowing, thus man, when proceeding from the primary Being that is Truth, longs for their knowledge. Although the Council gives Faith primacy over Reason (in tune with the teachings of Saint Thomas Aquinas), it declares that the arts and scientific disciplines come from God, and recognizes the importance of the principles and methods that govern them.

In accordance with the guidelines of the Vatican Council I, Pope Leo XIII in his Encyclical *Aeterni Patris* (August 4, 1879), distinguishes and claims the qualities and rights of both forms of knowledge, maintaining that Faith is for human Reason, the star that indicates the place of the port of truth. At the same time, the pope considers fair to recognize the proper scope of both, without confusing them; this does not prevent that, following the example of Saint Thomas Aquinas, both are "friendly associated", with the purpose of producing the benefit of knowledge. On the side of Faith, for its understanding and study, Leo XIII proposes to guide theological research through the principles of the Aristotelian scholasticism of Saint Thomas Aquinas; regarding Science, the Pope reiterates that the light of reason comes from God and, therefore, neither the Church nor Christian Philosophy can be contrary to the development of scientific research.

Late in the 20th century, the Second Vatican Council, through the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* (December 7, 1965), reaffirmed the teachings transmitted by the first Vatican Council regarding the importance of Science to bring man closer to the truth, although by itself the capacity to find the full truth is not recognized. It is inconvenient - the Council warns - that man trusts excessively in Reason, to the point of believing himself self-sufficient and independent of God.

Pope Paul VI, based on the reflections of the Council, alluded to the transcendental content that underlies in the field of study of Science, and insisted that it cannot by itself fully

explain it, so it must be open to the philosophical explanation: “How many stars in the sky! Certain. But how and why? How wonderful in the anatomy and physiology of the human body! Undoubtedly. But what is the human body for? For what man? Here science remains mute, and must be, at the risk of leaving its own domain” (Paul VI, April 23, 1966).

More recently, Pope John Paul II (September 14, 1998) promulgated the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, where in poetic form he pointed out that “faith and reason are like the two wings with which the human spirit rises towards the contemplation of the truth”. There should be no competition between the two, since both can help each other in the search for truth, without each losing its own space for realization: the transcendent, on the one hand; and the phenomenal, on the other. Faith can illuminate Reason, with which it is possible to reach the deep meaning of each thing. Therefore, Pope John Paul II advocates the development of a Philosophy of metaphysical scope, which is not limited to the phenomenal.

This last approach is taken up by Pope Benedict XVI (October 28, 2010), who proposes an interdisciplinary relationship between Science and philosophical reflection, in order to help scientists discover the epistemological foundation of their methodology. In addition, this conjunction would also contribute to address the limitation of Science, in that it cannot by itself “explain everything and satisfy the spiritual needs of man” (Benedict XVI, November 6, 2006). However, although Science is incapable of replacing Faith, also in terms of Reason it comes from God (First Being), who assigns an order to its creation (the great book of nature, according to Paul VI), which makes it possible its intelligibility and, therefore, its study through the scientific method. In fact, Science is a “patient and passionate search for the truth about the cosmos, nature and the constitution of the human being” (Benedict XVI, October 28, 2010).

In both Pope Benedict XVI and his successor Pope Francisco, Science must be guided by an ethic that joins it with the principles of fraternity and peace: “The scientific community is called to serve the human family and its integral development” (Francisco, November 12, 2018). This ethical position is anthropocentric: “Science does not exist except by and for man; it has to leave the circle of his research and lead to man, and through him to society and to the whole history” (Paul VI, April 23, 1966). However, when Faith enlightens Science, then it is able to rise and contribute knowledge in charity (“charity of knowledge”, Paul VI would affirm). A distinctive feature of the charitable ideal of Science, it is expressed

by Pope Francisco in the following terms: "How nice it would be if as we discover new distant planets, we rediscover the needs of the brother or sister in orbit around me" (Francisco, October 7, 2020).

Therefore, the Church has procured- from the First Vatican Council to the present - to bring closer, harmonize and complement the relationship between Faith and Reason, so man can "adequately know himself, the world and God" (John Paul II, September 14, 1998). In this sense, the Church's interest is not limited to promoting scientific research; It also aspires that knowledge be ordered to the welfare of the human being, and the horizon of faith is recognized in the search for truth.

The Church's proposal for a dialogue between Faith and Reason has been developing despite the differences between the two ways of reaching knowledge; this purpose has influenced the zeal favorably with which the Church itself has lavished attentions on these two roads that man travels in his search for truth. The political and economic leaders in the world who have the responsibility of leading the attention of the great current challenges of humanity -among which the preservation of life on our planet and the fraternal coexistence among peoples stand out-, can find in this dialogical attitude of the Church a testimony about the possibility of approaching positions despite differences, without the parts deny of their principles or renounce to their convictions.

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