
Schematic Overview

Aeterni Patris

A Structural Outline of Leo's Argument

Pope Leo XIII, 1879

Magisterium Mondays

I. The Diagnosis (§§ 1–2)

- Christ committed to the Church an unfailling teaching authority; the Pontiffs have always guarded the right ordering of philosophy to faith.
- The bitter strifes of the present age are traced to **false philosophical conclusions** that have crept from the schools into the orders of the state.
- Philosophy alone cannot dispel error — grace is required — but the right use of philosophy is among the natural helps God has supplied to the human race.

II. Philosophy as Preparation for Faith (§§ 3–5)

- Augustine: philosophy is 'that by which the most wholesome faith is begotten, nourished, defended, and made strong.'
- Philosophy is called by the ancients a **steppingstone to the faith**, the prelude and help of Christianity, the Gospel teacher.
- Certain truths divinely proposed for belief were also reached by pagan reason; the Fathers turned this pagan inheritance to the service of revealed doctrine, as Israel took the gold of Egypt.
- From human reason rightly used we know that God is, that He is wisdom and justice itself, that the Gospel rests on certain signs, and that the Church is its own great motive of credibility.

III. Philosophy as Servant of Theology (§§ 6–7)

- Theology requires philosophy to take on **the nature, form, and genius of a science** — to order the parts of revealed doctrine into a unified body.
- Philosophy gives theology a fuller understanding of the mysteries through analogy with naturally known things and through the connection of the mysteries with one another and with man's final end (Vatican I).
- Philosophy is also the **bulwark of faith**: it weakens the arguments of the sophists, repels veiled attacks, and supplies arms for defense.
- Lateran V commands Christian teachers to use philosophy in refuting fallacious arguments.

IV. The Right Ordering of Reason and Faith (§§ 8–9)

- Reason must not affect powers beyond itself, deny supernatural truths, or interpret them at will — it serves as **handmaid and attendant** to revelation.
- In matters open to natural intelligence, philosophy uses its own method, principles, and arguments — never against revealed doctrine.
- To philosophize under the obedience of faith is to philosophize in the best possible way; faith does not diminish reason but adds to its nobility, keenness, and stability (Vatican I).

V. The Patristic Witnesses (§§ 10–13)

- Pagan philosophers, lacking faith, fell into errors about God, the world, providence, virtue, and the end of man.
- The Fathers received the pagan philosophers with discernment: kept what was true, rejected what was false.
- **Apologists:** Justin Martyr, Quadratus, Aristides, Hermias, Athenagoras, Irenaeus.
- **Alexandrians:** Clement, Origen.
- **Latin Fathers:** Tertullian, Arnobius, Lactantius.
- **Eastern Fathers:** Athanasius, Chrysostom, Basil, the two Gregories.
- **Augustine:** most powerful genius, treats every region of philosophy.
- **Later:** John Damascene (East), Boethius and Anselm (West).

VI. The Rise of Scholasticism (§§ 14–16)

- The Scholastics collected, sifted, and ordered the patristic inheritance for posterity.
- Sixtus V on the two great Scholastic doctors: **the angelic St. Thomas and the seraphic St. Bonaventure.**
- Scholastic theology's strengths — coherent causality, ordered argument, clear definition — depend on a right use of philosophy.

VII. The Primacy of St. Thomas Aquinas (§§ 17–23)

- Thomas is **chief and master of all** the Scholastics; he inherited the intellect of the ancient doctors (Cajetan).

- He gathered the scattered limbs of patristic doctrine into one ordered whole; supplied invincible arms against both prior and future errors.
- He distinguished reason and faith without separating them: reason on his wings can scarcely rise higher; faith can scarcely expect stronger aid from reason.
- The great religious orders — Dominicans, Benedictines, Carmelites, Augustinians, Society of Jesus — commanded their members to follow him.
- The great universities — Paris, Salamanca, Alcalá, Douay, Toulouse, Louvain, Padua, Bologna, Naples, Coimbra — were his kingdom.
- The Pontiffs witnessed: Clement VI, Nicholas V, Benedict XIII, Pius V, Clement XII, Urban V, Innocent XII, Benedict XIV, Innocent VI.
- The councils witnessed: Lyons, Vienna, Florence, Vatican I; **Trent** placed the *Summa* on the altar beside Scripture and the papal decrees.
- Even Protestant leaders admitted: take away Thomas and the Catholic teachers fall.

VIII. The Crisis since the Sixteenth Century (§ 24)

- The innovators of the sixteenth century **philosophized without respect for faith**; each invented in accord with his own pleasure.
- Systems multiplied; conclusions clashed; the mind slipped from doubt into error.
- Some Catholic philosophers, attracted by novelty, threw aside the ancient patrimony to build new edifices — ill-advisedly, and to the detriment of the sciences.
- Erudition is welcome; but theology requires the grave manner of the Scholastics if it is to remain 'the invincible bulwark of the faith.'

IX. The Restoration of Thomistic Wisdom (§§ 25–31)

- Already many advocates of philosophy aim to **restore the renowned teaching of Thomas Aquinas**.
- Youth, especially those who are the growing hope of the Church, must be nourished on robust doctrine, ready to give a reason for the hope that is in them (1 Pet 3:15).
- Thomas's teachings on **liberty, authority, law, princely rule, obedience, and mutual charity** overturn the principles of the new order.
- The liberal arts and the physical sciences will gain from the restoration, not suffer.

- The Scholastic doctrine that the intellect knows immaterial things only through the sensible is no enemy of empirical science — Albertus Magnus and Thomas themselves attended diligently to natural things.
- **Restore the wisdom of St. Thomas** — not whatever in the Scholastic corpus is too subtle, too carelessly stated, or now obsolete; draw from Thomas's own fountains, or at least from rivulets agreed to be pure.

X. Closing Prayer and Benediction (§§ 32–34)

- God alone is the God of all knowledge; every good gift comes down from the Father of lights.
- Follow Thomas's example: never read or write without first begging God's blessing.
- Invoke the Blessed Virgin Mary, **Seat of Wisdom**, with St. Joseph and the Apostles Peter and Paul.
- The Pope bestows the apostolic benediction on the bishops, clergy, and flocks.