

▼ Introduction

▼ Origins of the Crisis

- ▼ **The current situation in the Church did not come about “all of a sudden.”**
 - Ideas that appear now had already been introduced before.
 - More importantly, previous events certainly influence the way men think.
 - Shakespeare calls custom a “tyrant” (Othello) – when men become accustomed to thinking a certain way, it is hard to think any differently.
- ▼ **Today, we want to look back at some of the origins in thought of the current crisis we are facing.**
 - This allows us better to understand what the crisis is and how it arose.
 - It also helps us see what, in our own thinking, may be affected by these wrong ideas.
 - And, in general, we have to admit that we are so affected because we have grown up in this world and we are children of this world. Realizing this is part of “know thyself,” as the Greek sages counseled.

▼ Disclaimer

- ▼ **What I cover in this discussion is mainly philosophical ideas, or ways of thinking.**
 - Don’t be intimidated – I will try to explain them simply.
 - Future episodes will certainly unfold these more.
 - Today, I just want to present a few of these ideas to begin to see how they have affected us today.
- ▼ **Note that we really do not have the time to go into great detail with any of these ideas.**
 - This is just an initial, a cursory glance.
 - I will mention a couple of books at the end which can provide further reading.

▼ Background

- ▼ **We have selected three “systems of thought” to investigate today: nominalism, Luther’s thought, and Kantianism.**
 - These three are connected to each other, as I will explain.
- ▼ **If we had to give the “theme” for these three ideas it would be the following:**
 - ▼ Each of these three ideas calls into question man’s understanding of the things which are outside of him.
 - ▼ If I see a tree and I say, “that is a tree,” there are two ways that I could understand that statement:
 - I could say that, yes, distinct from me and outside of me there really does exist a thing of such a nature, and I call that a “tree.”
 - Or else I could say that, well, I don’t know *what* it is outside of me that I know, but I do know that I call my impression of it “tree.”
 - In some sense, all three of these positions are going to assert the latter statement.
 - ▼ Therefore, too, knowing reality is no longer a question of receiving into our mind what is outside our mind; rather, it is a question of imposing something of ourselves on whatever is outside us.
 - This is already very close to saying that the truth depends upon man.
 - ▼ We can begin to see the connection with some modern issues:
 - For example: religion becomes a question also of what man does and imposes on what is outside him.
 - But then each man can have his own “religious experience” (a phrase that Modernism will use), and further, all of these experiences will be entirely legitimate, since we have no way of knowing the reality outside of us except by our own impressions of it (or by what we impose upon it).

- If some of these general points I just made do not fully make sense, that's fine – we will see them more as we go through the three positions.

▼ Nominalism

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- The position we call “nominalism” was primarily championed by William of Occam, who lived from the latter part of the 13th century and into the 14th century.
- The word “nominalism” comes from the Latin word “nomen” which means “name.” We will see in a minute why it gets called this.

▼ Position

▼ To understand the claim of nominalism, I will take an example:

- I point to you and say, “You are a human being.” Then I point to myself and say, “I am a human being.”
- Here we have the same phrase “human being” (or, if you will, simply “man”) being said of two different things. How is that possible?

▼ To the question, “what is happening when I use the same name of multiple things?” there are multiple answers. It seems to be a deceptively simple question, and yet philosophers have argued about it extensively.

▼ The answer which St. Thomas Aquinas gives – following Aristotle's philosophy – is this:

- ▼ Both you and I have something which is the same, and we call that a “nature” or “essence.”
 - (We use the word “nature” like this in common parlance: “Oh, that's just a cat's nature.” Or even, “dogs will be dogs – why? Because that's their *nature*.”)
 - This shared nature in both of us we call “the nature of man” and in virtue of this shared nature, I use the same name of both of us: “I am a man” and “You are a man” (by “man,” I mean “human being” here).
 - When my mind knows you, what it grasps first is this nature, and it sees quickly that many different things share the nature – therefore, it imposes a name on what is shared.

▼ Now the answer of nominalism to the question of what is happening when I use the same name of multiple things is quite different:

- Nominalism begins by claiming that there is no “nature” which you and I share, or, at the very least, I cannot know it. You and I are just individuals, each with our own characteristics and so on.
- Therefore, when I call you a “human being” and when I call myself a “human being,” I am myself imposing this name on us, and it remains simply a name.
- I use it for convenience to refer to both of us, perhaps because of some similarity I notice between us, but that's about it.
- Therefore, the mind here is “active” in the sense that it is imposing on the things outside something which it really has no justification to impose.

▼ And, as a further result, I cannot ascribe attributes to the things themselves in virtue of some common “nature” that they possess.

- In the position of St. Thomas Aquinas, we would say something like, “Man is rational, and therefore to be ruled by his reason is a demand of *his very nature*.”
- But nominalism would reject this statement as being unknowable, at best. If some men rule themselves by their reason, this says nothing about a common nature which they share, but only about them as individuals.

▼ We can begin to see the seeds of subjectivism which this position sows.

- Truth is no longer a question of my mind receiving something from outside it, and conforming itself to what is outside.
- “Truth” is rather going to involve an *imposition* of my mind on what is outside it. My mind will be “true” when I recognize what I am doing, and maybe when I follow that with consistency.

- So, “truth” begins to lose its reference to what is outside me and does not depend upon me.

▼ Transition

- Nominalism greatly influenced the Augustinians, who were the theological teachers of Martin Luther.
- So now we will move on to Luther’s own position, to see how this initial error enters thought about religion.

▼ Luther

▼ Introduction

- Jacques Maritain, in his book called “Three Reformers,” says rightly that the whole life of a heresiarch usually depends on the error he professes. But, Maritain further points out, with Luther we find the opposite: Luther’s own life and problems are the source of his error.

▼ So, it is necessary to give a few, very brief notes about Luther’s own life. (Another resource here is Fr. Gleize’s “Luther’s True Face.”)

- Luther entered religious life as an Augustinian monk. At the beginning, he was fervent, but always worried and agitated.
- His own decision to enter religious life had been taken while he was caught in a violent storm. This fact highlights Luther’s own feverish temperament.
- ▼ Luther undergoes a real crisis of scruples in his religious life. He thought (incorrectly) that he had to feel himself in the state of grace, and accordingly he sought to escape the scruples by some kind of assurance that he was “ok.”
 - As many spiritual authors (and saints) point out, the only true way out of the trial of scruples is ready and complete obedience to a confessor or spiritual director.
 - Through this trial (and because he was looking in the wrong place), Luther constantly feels discouraged. He simply cannot satisfy his own conscience, and he cannot escape from the constant tension and anxiety.
 - It is this “state of soul” in Luther that is responsible for his errors, as we will see shortly.

▼ In this presentation of Luther’s ideas, I will confine myself to two points:

- First, the fundamental and “foundational” principle of Luther, and therefore of Protestantism.
- Second, one of the main characteristics of Luther’s position.

▼ Foundational Principle of Luther’s Thought

▼ Faced with his own inability to escape what he saw as evil, Luther seeks to find a system which can soothe him:

- He reasons somewhat as follows: “If something is evil in me, and I cannot overcome it, that must mean that I am evil by nature; I cannot help it. And if this is so, then everything must be like me, intrinsically evil. Accordingly, the only thing I can do is accept what I am – evil.”
- This idea that human nature is fundamentally corrupted is the foundational principle of Luther’s thought. Sometimes, we express this as follows: by Original Sin, Adam irreparably destroyed the goodness of human nature; accordingly, man is inherently evil.
- Of course, Luther wants to find some way to salvation, and so he comes up with the further idea that God saves man by covering our intrinsic corruption with the justice of Christ.

▼ To be saved, then:

- First, man must recognize his radical inability to do anything but what is evil – he must, in some manner “despair” of himself.
- Second, man must believe and have confidence that the blood of Christ will save us despite the fact that we are and remain essentially evil.

▼ These two points are contained in that horrific statement: “Sin boldly, but believe still more boldly.”

- Luther goes so far as to say that sinning could be better than practicing virtue, because when we sin, we realize better what we are, and so we are in a position to believe more strongly in the blood of Christ.

▼ **Connection with nominalism:**

- We must also remember that Luther was instructed in the nominalism tradition, and this gives him a real distrust of human reason and its ability to attain to objective truth.
- This distrust fits the idea that my nature is inherently corrupt, and Luther therefore claims that “reason is directly opposed to faith... in believers it should be killed and buried... she is the whore of the devil.”
- Accordingly, Luther’s “faith” is not an act of reason at all, but rather a kind of act of the will – or, better, a “feeling.” I have to “feel” that I am saved by Christ’s blood, no matter what I do.
- Accordingly, true religion is something entirely *interior*, depending only on my own internal state.

▼ **We see, then, why Luther posited “sola fide” – “by faith alone” – because he asserted that man was completely corrupt and all he could do was trust that God would cover his corruption with the merits of Christ.**

- Incidentally, there is a real contradiction in Luther’s thought: the confidence that Luther says we must have can only be an act that man makes, and therefore (by his own statement) evil. So how can it be necessary?

▼ Again, we can also see how psychologically destructive Luther’s system is:

- Catholicism encourages good works because they truly merit an increase of grace for us. Moreover, we know that our works are good because we have something outside of us to which we can measure them up (e.g. in confession, the priest passes judgment and gives us absolution).
- Luther sweeps away all of these works, and replaces them with just one work – the act of “faith” or really, confidence – and at the same time, he destroys any means of knowing whether or not we have actually made this act. Our whole salvation depends upon an act that we don’t know how to make and can never know whether we have made it or not.

• Private Judgment