

# HIGH MIDDLE AGES, 11<sup>TH</sup> THROUGH 13<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES:

*“Sun from the East enlightens the West”*

*Text prepared by Erdal Yavuz*

## Affairs of the *Levant*\*

The trade connecting Byzantium with Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, particularly the luxury goods of Oriental (*Levantine*) origin, accentuated the cultural differences between the Byzantine Empire and Western Europe.

Missionary expeditions, Byzantine conquests in the Balkans, and commercial relations with northeastern Europe resulted in the conversion of the peoples in the Balkans and Southern Russia to Orthodox Christianity. One of their most important contributions was the development of a Cyrillic script for the Slavic languages.

The difference between Eastern and Western Europe became more evident in the split between orthodox Christianity and Catholicism.

In 1054, an orthodox patriarch in Constantinople raised theological questions which led to a complete division between the Roman and Eastern versions of Christianity.

The split from the West was not simply religious but over time political and cultural differences also developed

## The European mosaic takes shape

Throughout the medieval period, Europe lagged behind other civilized regions of the world in terms of its economy, technological development, and learning.

This inferiority of European civilization is also one of the reasons of its curiosity as well as its hostility toward the more powerful world of Islam revealed by the Crusades.

After Charlemagne and his successors in the eighth century, the Carolingian Empire was first divided between his three sons, and finally into two main parts:

The relatively more centralized kingdom of France in the West, and the “Holy Roman Empire”

The latter was a loose union of numerous regional monarchies and principalities, spreading throughout today’s Germany and Italy. (It is important to know that these two regions could achieve their national” unities only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century)

With the title maintained as “The Holy Roman Emperor”, kingdom of the Germans paradoxically was among the least centralized governments of the medieval ages.

By the tenth and eleventh centuries an economic revival began particularly in the urban centers. However the “merchant” was not yet accepted as a useful category. Read the box in next page.

The **Levant** is an approximate historical geographical term referring to a large area in Southwest Asia south of the Taurus Mountains, bounded by the Mediterranean Sea in the west, and the north Arabian Desert and Mesopotamia to the east.

The term Levant, originally used in the wider sense of “Mediterranean lands east of Italy”, is first attested in English in 1497, from Middle French *levant* designating the “The Orient”, the participle of lever “to raise”, as in *soleil levant* “rising sun”. The French itself derives from Latin *levare*.

It thus refers to the direction of the rising sun, from a Mediterranean perspective.

Today, it is typically used in conjunction with prehistoric or ancient and medieval historical references, by archaeologists and historians, as when discussing the Crusades.

The name Levantines was applied to people of Italian (Venetians and Genoese), French, or of other Mediterranean origin who lived in Asia Minor during the time that area had been conquered by the Ottoman Empire. These people were for the majority descendants of the Crusader States or traders.



A merchant with money bag and his wife

## Medieval look to “the Merchant”

The 13th and 14th centuries saw a tremendous growth in commercial activity, and a consequent restructuring of society, away from the feudal system. Changing attitudes towards trade and the merchant class marked this period. The merchant himself changed in his attitude towards his work, in his duties and abilities, and in his educational background.

All of this, combined with the Church's criticism of commerce and usury, created a multi-layered complex of attitudes towards those who made their living by buying and selling goods or dealing with money. Boccaccio reflects these changes in several of his novellas, as he portrays merchants as victims of the times, and also as heroes on the forefront of social change.

The old, feudal model of society was dominated by the concept that there were three divinely ordained orders: knights, clergy, and peasants. Each of these groups had a role to play, either defense of the realm, maintenance of the soul of society, or the growing of essential foodstuffs. The merchant, as a class, was discriminated against for not contributing to these essential duties, but rather for aiming to get rich himself.

Merchants' pursuit of gain was considered against the laws of God, because he was not a producer of real goods, but rather a resaler, or a usurer. Although medieval society increasingly came to rely upon the merchant's services in distributing and obtaining items not produced locally, he was nonetheless considered a parasite and a sinner, barely tolerated for his questionable contribution to society's output.

From:  
<http://www.brown.edu/Departments/ItalianStudies/dweb/society/structure/merchantcult.html>

The development of towns and trade in part was due to diminishing of the external menace which the Vikings, Normans and Germans had posed in the previous centuries. As a result a relatively better political stability could be achieved.

On the other hand, the population increases, meaning cheaper “manpower” for the agricultural production which also contributed to a rise in the demand for other goods.

While the feudalism prevented the growth of the centralized states, due to the same social and economic particularities it could not check the

development of competitive forces. Competition helped further intensification and improvement of productivity.

Regional centers of the trade began to flourish and a merchant class began to gain importance.

## The Rise of Towns

As regards the birth and growth of medieval towns, a combination of various factors has to be considered. Above all, a variety of social groups were involved.

The towns were born not only as a result of the re-awakening trade, but also out of the growth of agriculture in the West, which was beginning to provide urban centers with a better supply of food and manpower.

Population growth was one of the major reasons for the European expansion. The main reason behind the expansion between tenth and fourteenth centuries was an intensive land clearance movement, which was seen by some historians as the agrarian revolution.

## POPULATION OF SOME TOWNS, YEAR 1000

Town	Population
Cordova, Spain	450,000
Kaifeng, China	400,000
Istanbul, Turkey	300,000
Angkor, Cambodia	200,000
Kyoto, Japan	175,000
Cairo, Egypt	135,000
Baghdad, Iraq	125,000
Nishapur, Iran	125,000
Al-Hasa, Saudi Arabia	110,000
Seville, Spain	90,000
Venice, Italy	45,000
London, England	25,000
Paris, France	20,000
Florence, Italy	15,000

## Strong versus weak state

As a general rule it is said that strong central rule is associated with retarded commerce due to controls on prices and capital accumulation.

By contrast, weaker governments that cannot control the accumulation or obliged to share the power with merchants are associated with economic growth. But this pattern does not hold between “constitutional” Europe and “despotic” Asia of the pre-capitalist period.

German colonization of the Eastern Europe contributed not only to the large scale conversions of pagan people but also helped to put new regions under cultivation.

Along with this internal expansion of Europe, crusades can be seen as the external expansionist movement, which seemed to act as an outlet for the excess population of the west.

Although at the beginning the towns remained to be small as compared to those of the East, their relative independence from a central authority aided the development of market relations and capital accumulation.

As can be observed in the box on the left, the differences in population between Eastern and Islam dominated towns and those of the West were spectacular.

### European expansion of “Late Middle Ages”

A population growth and lack of satisfactory means of subsistence due to yet limited technology and restricted trade opportunities, brought about an early Western attempt at expansion.

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The Crusades launched with the pretext of recovering the Holy Lands from the Moslems is a dramatic example of how economic necessity could mobilize the masses under the guise of religious motives.

The First Crusade was launched in 1095 by Pope Urban II to regain control of the sacred city of Jerusalem and the Christian Holy Land from Muslims. What started as a minor call for aid quickly turned into a full migration and conquest of territory outside of Europe.

Both knights and peasants from many different nations of Western Europe, with little central leadership, traveled over land and by sea towards Jerusalem. They city was captured in July 1099, leading

to the establishment of the Kingdom of Jerusalem and the other Crusader states.

Although these gains did not continue for more than two hundred years, the Crusades constituted a major turning point in the history of Western expansion. The First Crusade succeeded in establishing the "Crusader States" of *Edessa* (Urfa), *Antioch*(Antakya), *Jerusalem* ((Kudüs) and certain others and was the only crusade—in contrast to the many that followed—to achieve its stated goal ..

However the following Crusades were less successful, and the aim to recover the Holy Land was lost. A stunning example of the way this aim could be perverted is the Fourth Crusade during which the crusaders ended up capturing and pillaging Constantinople in 1204.

During the high medieval ages of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there was a greater creativity and economic prosperity. However tensions also mounted between the agents of the regional order, the monarchic powers, and the claims of the church for the universal authority.



A contemporary illustration of the Crusades



## Between Faith and Reason

Until 1000, most “scientific” inquiry was restricted to the collection of ancient texts related to important theological questions. Efforts were made to incorporate logical thinking in theological inquiry.

Use of logic, particularly reflecting the influence of Aristotle, led to new theological lines of inquiry only after 1000.

The pursuit of rationalism within theology under the influence of Islamic philosophers led to the growth of western universities and stimulated the rediscovery of classical philosophy.

### The Impact of the Authority!

“Thus we argued that matter together, and then as we still had time left for talking, a certain nephew of mine, who had come along with the others, rather adding to the tangle than unraveling it, urged me to publish something fresh in the way of Arabian learning.

As the rest agreed with him, I took in hand the treatise which follows: of its profitableness to its readers I am assured, but am doubtful whether it will give them pleasure.

The present generation has this ingrained weakness that it thinks that nothing discovered by the moderns is worthy to be received -the result of this is that if I wanted to publish anything of my own invention I should attribute it to someone else, and say, "Someone else said this, not I." Therefore (that I may not wholly be robbed of a hearing) it was a certain great man that discovered all my ideas, not I”

*from Adelard of Bath, Preface to His Very Difficult Natural Questions, [Dodi Ve-Nechdi] c. 1137*

At the beginnings universities were situated within churches and specialized in theology, law, and medicine which is the conventional educational system that started to emerge after the 11<sup>th</sup> century.

Universities thus developed in a decentralized manner. At the early stages they benefited from the importation of ideas, while strong emphasis on classical knowledge discouraged new scientific discoveries.

A well known example of this period is Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) of the University of Paris who attempted to summarize all theological knowledge in his *Summa Theologica*. His work marked the high point of scholasticism. **(Read the text)**

However the former understanding of knowledge could not easily change.

Remark and think on the concept of “literacy” of that period, as it appears below.

### Definition of an “illiterate”!

“All those who are ignorant of the Latin poets, historians, orators, and mathematicians should be called *illiterati* even if they know letters.”

John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 1159

## Medieval Universities

The first European medieval universities were established in Italy, France and England in the late 11th and the 12th Century for the study of arts, law, medicine, and theology.

With the increasing professionalization of society during the 12th and 13th centuries, a similar demand grew for professional clergy. Prior to the 12th century, the intellectual life of Europe had been relegated to monasteries, which were mostly concerned with the study of the liturgy and prayer; very few monasteries could boast true intellectuals.

Following the Gregorian Reform's emphasis on canon law and the study of the sacraments, bishops formed cathedral schools to train the clergy in canon law, but also in the more secular aspects of church administration, including logic and disputation for use in preaching and theological discussion, and accounting to more effectively control finances.

Learning became essential to advancing in the ecclesiastical hierarchy, and teachers attracted prestige as well. However, demand quickly outstripped the capacity of cathedral schools, which were essentially run by one teacher. On top of that, tensions rose between the students of cathedral schools and burghers in smaller towns. So, cathedral schools migrated to large cities, like Paris and Bologna....

The development of the medieval university coincided with the widespread reintroduction of Aristotle from Byzantine and Jewish scholars and the decline in popularity of Platonism and Neoplatonism in favor of Aristotelian thought.

For a detailed information see:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval\\_university](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_university)

### Universities in the order of foundation

University of Bologna, Italy – founded 1088

University of Paris, France – founded 1150

University of Oxford, England – founded before 1167

University of Modena, Italy – founded 1175

University of Vicenza, Italy – founded 1204

University of Cambridge, England – founded 1209

In addition to the “official” theology, which took its roots from the classical and pagan periods, the veneration of “saints”, magic and popular festivals remained features of popular religious beliefs and world views.

While we are on the subject of the universities lets see a small portrait of the university students of the period:

### Good old students!

*“Almost all the students at Paris, foreigners and natives, did absolutely nothing except learn or hear-something new. Some studied merely to acquire knowledge, which is curiosity; others to quire fame, which is vanity; others still for the sake of gain, which is cupidity and the vice of simony.*

*Very few studied for their own edification , or that of others. They wrangled and disputed not merely about the various sects or about some discussions; but the differences between the countries also caused dissensions, hatreds and virulent animosities among them and they impudently uttered all kinds of affronts and insults against one another.*

*They affirmed that the English were drunkards and had tails; the sons of France proud, effeminate and carefully adorned like women. They said that the Germans were furious and obscene at their feasts; the Normans, vain and boastful...(etc.) .. the Sicilians, tyrannical and cruel. After such insults from words they often came to blows”.*

From Jacques de Vitry (Jacobus de Vitriaco) (1160-1240): Hist. occid. Bk.II, Ch.VII.

Source:

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/vitry1.html>

Western artists concentrated on religious subjects almost exclusively. Medieval architecture developed from the Roman models. During the eleventh century, Gothic architecture replaced the more imitative Romanesque style. Writing in Latin was primarily devoted to theology, government, and law.

Popular literature emerged in the vernacular languages of Europe. Although always with some reference to religion, vernacular literature often featured more earthly concerns as well.

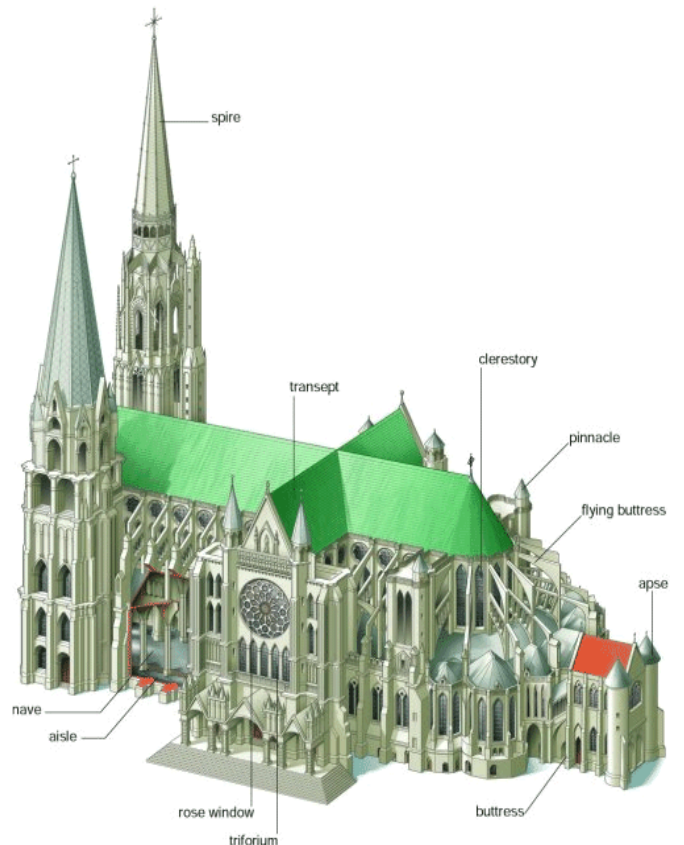
### The Blossoming of Literature

The literature of High Middle Ages, varied, lively, and impressive as it was, hosted a revival of grammatical studies in the cathedral schools and universities, which led to the production of some

excellent Latin poetry. The best examples were secular lyrics, especially those written in the twelfth century by a group of poets known as Goliards. Their poetry is particularly significant both for its robust vitality and for being the first clear counter-statement to the ascetic ideal of Christianity.

In addition to the use of Latin, the vernacular languages of French, German, Spanish, and Italian became increasingly popular as tools of literary expression. At first, most vernacular works of literature were written in the epic form. Among the leading examples were the French Song of Roland, the German Song of Nibelungs, and the Spanish Poem of the Cid. Basically all of these works were originally composed between 1050 and 1150. These epics portrayed a virile but unpolished society.

In comparison to the epics, an enormous change in both the subject matter and style was witnessed in the twelfth-century France by the troubadour poets and the writers of courtly romances. The troubadours were courtier poets who came from southern France known as Provençal. The style was far more sophisticated than the epic form, and the eloquent lyrics, which were meant to be accompanied by music, originated the theme of romantic love.



A typical example of “Gothic” cathedral



An equally important twelfth-century French innovation was the composition of longer narrative poems known as romances. These can be considered as the first clear ancestors of the modern novels. Their subject matter was usually love and adventure.

The most famous example of the genre was Arthurian romances, which took its material from the legendary exploits of the Celtic hero King Arthur and his many chivalrous knights.

The *Canterbury Tales* (d. app. 1387) are Geoffrey Chaucer's major achievement in the era's English literature, appearing to exemplify the whole range of current European imagination, as characters in a pilgrimage to Canterbury tell each other stories on the way.

The Prologue is almost a portrait of entire nation, telling about the pilgrims in the most natural manner. Chaucer's ironical portrayals of a monk and a scholar reveal are given in the following selection.

*"This monk was therefore a good man to horse;  
Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds, to course.  
Hunting a hare or riding at a fence  
Was all his fun, he spared for no expense.  
I saw his sleeves were garnished at the hand  
With fine grey fur, the finest in the land,  
And on his hood, to fasten it on his chin  
He had a wrought-gold cunningly fashioned pin  
Into a lover's knot it seemed to pass"  
[...]*

*"An Oxford Cleric, still a student though,  
One who had taken logic long ago,  
Was there; his horse was thinner than a rake,  
And he was not too fat, I undertake,  
But had a hollow look, a sober stare;  
The thread upon his overcoat was bare.  
He had found no preferment in the church  
And he was too unworldly to make search  
For a secular employment"*



From Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*.  
Translated into modern English by Neville Coghill,  
1951, 1958. Penguin Classics Series.

## The decline of medieval synthesis

Growth of a greater agricultural production and of trade and banking led to the urbanization and more specialized commercial activities.

The banking operations emerged in Italy as well in southern Germany, the Low Countries, France, and Great Britain.

It was generally the Italian merchants who started to connect Europe to other parts of Eurasia through the Mediterranean commercial routes.

This will lead to and the epoch known as "The Renaissance"

## The Renaissance

The term literally means rebirth. During the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries in Europe, especially in Italy, the new society was viewed as a rebirth of the society and culture of ancient Rome and Greece in contrast to later Medieval Civilization' which was considered as "Dark Ages.

This period is characterized by changes in many areas of human thought and activities including political, cultural, intellectual, scientific and economic pursuits.

Basic developments during the "Renaissance Period "

**1. Territorial unification:** The scattered territories of some of the European kingdoms were unified into a solid geographical and political unit.

**2. Increasing centralization of government:** Aimed to control politically and economically more activities of the society with greater effectiveness. This was especially in the areas of jurisdiction, taxes, councils and bureaucratic administration.

**3. Limiting the power and influence of the nobility:** Feudal nobility as a decentralizing force was an obstacle to unity and royal power and especially to the new economic relations. To overcome this, kings tried to replace provincial loyalties with loyalty to their own dynastic nationalism. Royal alliances with newly emerging bourgeoisie and royal policy of supporting commerce and industry were tools of this struggle.

**4. Evolution of a secularism** which found its expression as humanism. Secularism is in the sense to conceive man as an individual rather than in his religious or sectarian identity, and a greater emphasis on worldly life. As the study of ancient Greece and Rome developed, intellectuals showed more awareness to human issues and man became the center of attention. This early humanism took the study of man, the world around him and his relation to the God as a main topic.

Although capitalism had begun to develop, the protectionist guild system continued to dominate the European cities.

Traders and the craftsmen grouped together to order their commercial and industrial efforts, monopolized their companies, and regulated the access to the trade.

Adhesion in the guilds was the key to professional integration. In spite of the general conservatism of the guilds, Western industrial technology took steps to catch up with other civilizations during the late medieval ages.

Commercial alliances resulted in the formation of the inter-urban leagues, such as the Hanseatic League of Germany. The development of the banking operations helped to create a business environment in which market relations could be further developed. Since their governments were less centralized, the Western traders had a greater freedom than their counterparts in other civilizations.

After 1300, elements of the medieval culture started to change under the pressure of the prolonged wars, the agricultural deficiencies, and the epidemic diseases mainly the plague also known as the “black death” The plague decreased the population causing a renewal of the social strains between peasantry and the owners. All these constraints were indications of the shattering of the medieval synthesis.

The aristocracy of landed property lost its monopoly on power.

The capacity of the church to control the development of Christianity, the most significant element of unification of the medieval west, decreased during the late medieval era. Scholasticism lost its dynamism and the intellectuals started to look for a new focus.

### What about the Orient?

In the Middle East, the philosophical rationalism faced with the resistance of the religious conservatives.

Mysticism and Islamic orthodox traditions were more acceptable than the pursuit of the scientific research. With the weakening of central state’s power feudal powers emerged and exerted a greater authority above the peasantry.

After the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a new world balance of power was formed.

The Mongol conquest caused the decline of Arab strength and opened up opportunities for new participants in the Islamic trade system.

The world trade network which was mostly under the control of the Abbasids became fragmented and the chief beneficiaries were the Europeans.

At the beginnings China seemed to emerge to take over the lead in world trade. But when China vacated the area of international trade due to internal problems and restrictions on trade, the nations of Western Europe began to assert themselves.



*Spread of the Black Death. Spread by merchants and travelers, the plague killed more than a third of Europe's population within five years.*

## Reading

### From the "Summa" of Thomas Aquinas

*Thomas Aquinas is perhaps the greatest and certainly the most famous example of that intellectual movement which we call medieval scholasticism. " Born into a noble Italian family in 1224 or 1225, Thomas pursued an ecclesiastical career and in 1244 he joined the Dominican order. Dominicans sent their newly-recovered recruit off to Paris. Scholars were rediscovering Aristotle, asking if and how his philosophy could be reconciled with Christian revelation. Thomas was destined to produce one great answer to that question.*

*Thomas' most significant work is his Summa theologiae or 'summary of Theology,' a work which attempts to present all of Christian theology as systematically as possible. Thomas worked on it from 1266 through 1273. When he stopped writing died three months later.*

*The first "question" in the Summa theologiae deals with The nature of Theology itself, the second with God's existence. The 'questions' are in turn divided into what Thomas calls "articles," specific queries concerning the topic being explored in that particular "question."*

*The following selection is the fifth article of question one "the Sacred doctrine, what it is and what it includes?".*

Article 5: Whether sacred doctrine is worthier than the other sciences.

Let us proceed to the fifth point. It seems that sacred doctrine is not worthier than other sciences. Certitude contributes to the worth of a science; yet other sciences, the premises of which cannot be doubted, seem to be more certain than sacred doctrine, the principles of which (that is, the articles of faith) are open to doubt.

Furthermore, it is characteristic of a lower science to draw on a higher one, just as music draws on arithmetic. Sacred doctrine draws from the philosophical disciplines, for Jerome says that "the ancient teachers so filled their books with the doctrines and opinions of philosophers that you do not know which to marvel at first, their worldly erudition or their knowledge of the scriptures." Thus sacred doctrine is inferior to other sciences.

But on the contrary, other sciences are called the maidservants of this one. Proverbs says, "She has sent her servants to invite to the tower (Prov. 9:3).

Response: It must be said that, since this science is practical in one respect and speculative in another, it transcends all other sciences, both speculative and practical. Among the speculative sciences, one is said to be worthier than another either because of its certainty or because of the worth of its subject. This science exceeds all others on both counts. It does so in regard to certainty because other sciences gain their certainty through the light of natural reason, which can err, whereas this one gains its certainty through the light of divine wisdom, which cannot be deceived. It does so in regard to the dignity of its matter because this science deals principally with things which transcend reason, being above it, whereas other sciences consider only those things which are subject to reason.

Among the practical sciences, one is said to be worthier if it is ordered to a higher end. Thus the study of politics is worthier than that of warfare because the good of an army is ordered to the good of the city it serves. The end of this science insofar as it is practical is eternal bliss, to which all other practical sciences are ordered as the ultimate end. Thus it is evident that this science is worthier than all others in every way.

To the first argument, therefore, it must be said that there is nothing to prevent that which is more certain in itself from being less certain to us because of the weakness of our intellects, which, as Aristotle says, "are related to the most evident things as the eyes of a bat are to the sun." Thus the doubt some people experience regarding articles of the faith is not due to their uncertainty, but to the weakness of the human mind. Nevertheless, as Aristotle observes, the smallest inkling of the highest matters is more desirable than certain knowledge of the least important matters.

To the second argument it must be said that this science can borrow something from the philosophical disciplines, not because it needs to do so, but in order to clarify its content. For it accepts its principles, not from other sciences, but immediately from God through revelation. Thus it does not receive from other sciences as from superiors, but rather uses them as inferiors and servants, just as an architect uses workers or a statesman uses soldiers. Moreover, its use of other sciences is due, not to any defect or insufficiency within itself, but to a defect in our intellect, which are more easily led to the things above reason set forth in this science if they travel by way of those things known through natural reason, which is the source of other sciences.