

ON THE HARDSHIPS AND CONSOLATIONS OF THEOLOGY

In the past fifty years, Theology has been forced to turn its attention on itself, to find out its true object, its methods, its possibilities, to determine its place among the other sciences. Haven't the development of methods and knowledge, the accent on the idea of life, the discovery of the communal ideal, sometimes the pretext of apostolate or an exaggerated confidence in purely human technique, introduced to the plan of Christian society the modern deliquescence of the individual's faith?

On the other hand, does not a rigid fixism which refuses to integrate into its sciences, even under the direction of the Church, the solid acquisitions of the scientific or of the methodological order, a fixism which neglects the need of a deeper understanding of spiritual life and the apostolic radiance of the Mystical Body, compromise either the progress of Theology as a science, or the universal salutary influence of revelation?

The Church is pre-contained entirely in Christ; and the knowledge of the Church is pre-contained in a lofty manner in the created knowledge which endowed the intelligence of Christ.¹ But the understanding of the theologian is like a little flame: "the human soul is weakened, its purity is altered by its union with the body, its light veiled, its virtue run down, its surge toward the heights held back. Its efficacy is like a little flame."²

Theological science, even if it has God for its object and perhaps because of the loftiness of its object, must, like all the other sciences, solve the problem of its integration in a human general culture. It is incontestable that the indefinitely increasing extension of the intellectual life in the multiplex domain of speculation, history, psychology and other sciences, makes a certain specialization absolutely necessary under pain of scattering and sterilizing initiative. But thinkers in all fields are reacting against excessive specialization.

¹ Cf. Clérissac, *Le Mystère de l'Église*, Chap. V.

² S. Thomas, *Expositio super Boetii de Trinitate*, proemium.

Because of the requirements of progress, this problem seeks even within the limits of the same science a reconciliation between the general knowledge of all the matters which are linked more or less immediately to this science and the scientific formation which is applied to a particular point of research. The Constitution *Deus Scientiarum Dominus* of 1931, presents explicitly the solution to what appears to some a dilemma in theological formation. The theologian, in four years ought to assimilate the whole of Theology, all the parts and tracts of Theology; he should know all the requirements of the positive and of the speculative method employed in the general study of Theology.³ But already, during his third year, practical exercises in scientific research should prepare him progressively and prudently for a specialization.⁴

If all the sciences have in common with theology this problem of coordination between the knowledge of the generally acquired elements of science and the formation in scientific research with the view of providing further progress of this science, Theology alone has to solve the following question: the conciliation of scientific formation, especially from the aspect of the acquisition of a science already formed with the need of vulgarization or of divulgation, to use a word less pejorative in signification.

Revelation which is reached simply and intuitively by faith, and starting from faith, in a discursive and technically elaborated manner by Theology, is destined for the salvation of all men.⁵

To classify the diverse ways of communicating a science, Saint Thomas, in the footsteps of Aristotle, invites us to distinguish the scientific exposition concerned only with the objective requisites of

³ On nature and method of theology, read E. Burke, "The Scientific Teaching of Theology in the Seminary". *Proceedings of CTSA IV* (1949) 129-73; Fenton, *The Concept of Sacred Theology*; Congar "Théologie," in *DTC*, XVI, Gagnebet, "Nature de la Théologie Spéculative", in *Rev. Thom.*, 44 (1938) 645-74.

⁴ Cf. J. de Ghellinck, *Les Exercices Pratiques du Séminaire en Théologie*, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer; Madoz, "Los Ejercicios Prácticos del 'Seminario' en Teología," in *Estudios eclesiásticos*, XIII (1934) 175-191; G. Yelle, *Travail Scientifique en Disciplines Ecclésiastiques*. (Montreal, 1945), chap. I-III.

⁵ Cf. Pius XI, Const. Apost. *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, AAS, XXIII (1931).

truth, and the oratorical exposition, that takes into account the dispositions of the audience.⁶ If therefore, sacred doctrine is considered as the object of preaching, as destined to awaken in men the knowledge of divine things, and to win their hearts, you can say that it should follow the rhetorical and not the scientific method of procedure. It is sort of a divine rhetoric in which we find the methods and forms of human oratory but changed over by a new purity and sovereign liberty.⁷ Its use will be more effective in as much as it is more pliant to the demands of the different material and technical means of communication whether sermon, theater, poetry, radio or television. In recent vindications on behalf of kerygmatic⁸ theology we can discern the need of the living witnessing which should accompany the transmission of the doctrinal message, the crying need of using more and more the Gospel and the Fathers in our preaching. We also come face to face with a need of transforming doctrinal and scientific theology according to the requirements of sacred oratory which aims at a more Christlike molding of souls. But what can never be admitted is the suppression of scientific and doctrinal formation for the benefit, so to say, of the kerygmatic.

May I suggest a more precise distinction between the three levels of theological pursuits?

- (1) Technical and scientific formation in the study of acquired theological science,
- (2) Formation for and exercise of scientific research, sufficiently integrated in a general theological culture,
- (3) Preaching sacred doctrine according to the requirements of the oratorical art.

⁶ Cf. *In Libros Peri Hermenias Expositio* libr. I, ch. IV, lect. VII, n. 5-6.

⁷ Cf. E. D. Benard, *The Appeal to the Emotions in Preaching*: Newman Book Shop, Westminster, 1944. On the grace of the Holy Ghost using the instrumentality of the Preacher, read Saint Thomas, *Sum. Theol.* IIa IIae, 171, 1; compare with Augustine's counsel: "Doceat, delectet, flectat." *De Doctr. Christiana*, c. XII (PL 34, 101).

⁸ For bibliography on *Kerygmatic Theology*, see *Bull. Thom.* (1942) nn. 561-606. For a good history of the dispute, read Guzzetti, *La Teologia della Predicazione*, in *La Scuola Cattolica*, LXXVII (1950) 260-82; summary in *Theology Digest* (St. Mary's, Kansas) no. 2 (May, 1952) 2-4.

Every priest should acquire a complete synthesis of Theology and be able to adapt it to preaching needs. Some, by reason of their talents, their formation, or their position, will have a special responsibility in the Mystical Body of Christ from the point of view of properly scientific research, and of the furtherance of theological science.⁹

What a joy it was for theologians to see Pius X canonized, on the 29th of May! The Pope of the Holy Eucharist recalled also on the 5th of April, 1905, the importance of following the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* in organized preaching.¹⁰ Then on the 25th of June, 1914, he pointed out Saint Thomas' *Summa Theologica* as the vital synthesis of theological formation.¹¹ These masterpieces are presented to us not as mere texts to be learned by heart and repeated, but as the living tools of theological wisdom and apostolic preaching.

These two means of a personal and living formation in theological synthesis and in its apostolic radiation underline the special function of theology in the Mystical Body. Furthermore, these two means bring out the mysterious introduction of the personal and collective element in the elaboration of the Christian doctrinal synthesis, its dependance on the preceding centuries and on the intense collaboration among theologians.¹²

Evidently, the need to adapt our preaching to the faithful is just as acute today as it was half a century ago when Saint Pius X published his memorable encyclical *Acerbo Nimis*. And His Holiness Pius the XII reminded us, in his exhortation *Menti Nostrae*, that a deep interior life is necessary to preach the Gospel. However, a methodical study of the objective truths of faith, a study under-

⁹ On the possibility and conditions of that scientific research, let us hear Pius XII: "At novimus etiam ex recta adsiduaque huius rei pervestigatione, atque ex variarum opinionum conflictu sententiarumque concursu, si modo veritatis amor ac debitum Ecclesiae obsequium eiusmodi inquisitionem dirigant, pretiosa scatere atque exsilire lumina, quibus in sacris quoque id genus disciplinis profectus reapse habeatur." *Enc. Mystici Corporis Christi*, AAS. XXXV (1943) p. 131.

¹⁰ Cf. AAS. 37 (1905) 624.

¹¹ Cf. AAS. 6 (1914) 336-341: *Ench. Cler.*, 888-893.

¹² Cf. Journet, *Introduction a la theologie* (Paris, Desclée de Brouwer), p. 131.

taken in the obscure clarity of analogy, is to give contemplation and preaching their sustenance lest they fall into subjectivism and relativism.

God, revealing himself to men, did so through human means of expression. Consequently, the Church, in its interpretation of revelation, follows the example set by God. Was not the Word Himself made Flesh? How then, can we hold that our human words express adequately and exhaustively the sublime, essentially supernatural realities of divine life?

By keeping the right measure between anthropomorphism and a destructive symbolism, we must take into account the analogy of being and of concepts. In applying this analogy to revelation we must acknowledge the limits intrinsic to human knowledge, whether it be in dealing with the various forms of expression used by God, or with the terms used in its elaboration by the teaching Church or by the theologians under the watchful eye of the Ordinary Magisterium.

Revelation came to an end with the death of the last apostle. Our understanding of this revelation is not given to us by new discussions of dogmas which have already been established, but by the explicitation of the primitive deposit of faith, by detecting at the core of the truths already known, other truths which have been left in the dark for centuries.

The progress of theological tradition, although it is not irrefutable as such, does not consist in denying the positive contribution of past generations, but in a deeper study of truths already existent. The consciousness of the underlying mystery, in the obscure-clarity of the intellect, along with the traditional synthesis given its true meaning in the living outline of sapiential thought, the *Summa Theologica*, help to understand and integrate new materials.

Under the guidance of the Magisterium, theologians are attempting to re-establish the unity known in the Church during her golden Age, the Middle Ages. This unity would find itself enriched by new data, new questions, furnished by the assimilation and the use of the auxiliary sciences which have since progressed. The *Summa Theologica* will go on being a living cathedral by the unity and purity of its lines, a cathedral re-enforced by new arches, transformed by new ornamentations and by far greater spiritual dimensions.

This intellectual cathedral is always bathed in the lights of revelation. To believe is "Cogitare cum assentione".¹³ Yes, faith and reflection are inseparable. Faith, once within the mind of the philosopher, will set all human wisdom into motion and it will put all its resources at work. Faith is evidently not the intuitive knowledge of the beatific vision which takes place without the use of signs. Faith reaches God through words: the words, the expression, the articles of the creed are instrumental and conventional signs. The very concepts which these words produce in the intellect are formal signs, and all of these signs have therefore a relative value in directing our minds toward the things signified: "an act of faith goes beyond the enunciation, it reaches the reality itself."¹⁴ This life-giving principle of theology is also that which gives the act of Faith its essentially supernatural character.

Is Theology an obstacle to contemplation? Some pseudo-mystics have maintained that it is.¹⁵ We must, it seems, admit that contemplation, in the strict sense, is the fruit of the predominating initiative of God's action within the soul, of operating grace, of the Gifts of the Holy Ghost. The gifts of knowledge, understanding and wisdom, which God develops in us by the passive purifications of the human condition of our theological virtues, especially of the virtue of faith, so as to enable it to lead the soul to an experimental ineffable and supraconceptual knowledge, a knowledge freed of all signs, will no doubt have a great influence on theology.¹⁶ However, *Theopathia* never declares war on Theology. True mystics will never deny the necessity of Theology. Saint John of the Cross, in the *Subida* holds the same doctrine as Saint Thomas in the *Summa*.¹⁷

¹³ *Sum. Theol.*, IIa, IIae, q. 2, art. 1; Augustine, *De Predestinatione Sanctorum*, cap. 2 (PL. 44, 963).

¹⁴ Cf. *Sum. Theol.*, IIa, IIae, q. 1, art. 2, ad. 2.

¹⁵ For example, Michael de Molinos; cf. *Denz.* 64.

¹⁶ Cf. A. Piolanti, "Teologia, carita e carisma nella dottrina di san Tommaso", *Doctor Communis* VI (1953) 174-186.

¹⁷ *Sum. Theol.*, IIa, IIae, 180; Maritain, *Les Degrés du Savoir*, c. VIII. God alone can produce in our soul that supraconceptual knowledge. That would be the explanation of Saint John of the Cross: "la razon de esto es porque a ninguna criatura le es licito salir fuera de los terminos que Dios la tiene naturalmente ordenados para su gobiernio. Al hombre le puso terminos naturales y racionales para su bubernio; luego querer salir de ellos no es

Theology as a science has a special method which deals with its specific object. The dogmatic data embodied in philosophical terms remain accessible to common sense, elementary ontology, but surpass it by their precision.¹⁸ Preaching presupposes theological knowledge and pastoral prudence but it is governed by the intellectual virtue of art and it is to be judged according to the rules of public speaking which take into account the principles of psychology and the technical methods of pedagogy as applied to a Christian training.

The apostle as a witness will have to adapt, transform the technical presentation of principles. He will have to assimilate those principles, they will have to become a part of his personality so that losing their technical aspect, they will enable him to put his doctrine across to all the faithful. Furthermore, the Church, once it has given theologians the living cathedral of theological knowledge, gives them the *Catechism of the Council of Trent*, as being the dynamic source of all their preaching. The transmission of human knowledge is at the mercy of conventional signs: words. The prophetic charism of the Church must take into account all the demands of the *ex auditu*.

If one of our joys today is to invoke Saint Pius X whose directions have helped the preceding considerations, another incentive of joy is to realize better through our meetings the unity of the Mystical Body of Christ. We work together in the field of theological wisdom, not to take away the due liberty and needed initiative of each theologian, but to share in common our experience and our research in this atmosphere of universal charity: "freedom in debatable matters and charity in all things." Thus the past meetings have thrown some light on many problems related to the scientific synthetical teaching of theology with its complex equipment in which theological method connotes some pedagogical considerations and organic relationship, on other problems related to pastoral theology, and especially on some problems of theological science *in fieri* on which progress was desired.

licito, y querer averiguar y alcanzar cosas por via sobrenatural es salir de los terminos naturales." *Subida del Monte Carmelo* (Edicion B.A.C., Madrid, 1950) L. 11, cap. XXI, 1.

¹⁸ Cf. Garrigou-Lagrange, *Le Sens Commun, la Philosophie de l'être et les Formules Dogmatiques*, part. 3 chap. III.

Through the corporate effort of our society a *forgotten note of the Church*¹⁹ comes to life. In the midst of that hate, harshness and distrust which treads across our earth, we Catholic theologians and writers have a common purpose, a wider spreading of the waves of that love Christ brought on earth. This our corporate body of theologians, under the directive mind of our Most Reverend Bishops, and above all of His Holiness the Roman Pontiff, tries to be a living echo of the last chapter of St. John's Gospel: "Love Christ, feed the lambs of Christ, in the one Christ's kingdom".

May Our good Mother, in the mysteries of Her Immaculate Conception and of Her Assumption, in this Marian Year, in this Marian city of Montreal, help us to spread the pacifying light of love.

Wednesday morning, our Host, His Eminence Paul-Emile Cardinal Léger, "le Cardinal du Rosaire", will celebrate for us the mass of the Holy Ghost in the chapel that was dedicated three centuries ago to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin, under the name of Notre-Dame de Bon Secours, Our Lady of Good Help. May Our good Mother, in the centenary of the proclamation of Her Immaculate Conception, in this Marian city of Montreal (diocesis marianopolitana), help us to spread the pacifying light of love.

¹⁹ Cf. Malachi J. Donnelly, in *AER* 127 (1952) 406-415.