

A COURSE IN THE POSITIVE THEOLOGY OF THE INCARNATION

It is now more than thirty years since Ferdinand Cavallera, the distinguished professor of positive theology at the Catholic Institute of Toulouse, in an article that can still be considered basic on the subject, tried to vindicate for positive theology some small share of its rightful place in the course of a theological education.¹ This branch of theology has in fact made tremendous progress in the course of the present century. A question might be raised, however, as to the extent that this progress is represented in the curriculum of the theological course. How many seminaries, for example, actually offer a formal course in the positive theology of any particular tract?

In the light of such a possibility and granted its desirability, it might be profitable to analyze from both a theoretical and a practical point of view the basic issues involved. These might be reduced to four: first and foremost, the attitude of the Church toward positive theology in general and its place in a theological education in particular; secondly, the relation that a positive theology course would have to the already established courses in Scripture and biblical theology; thirdly, the theoretical justification for such courses and the values that might be expected to emerge from their introduction; and finally, the ways and means of organizing a specific course, e.g., in the positive theology of the Incarnation, to illustrate these points.

A. *Attitude of the Church*

Reference to positive theology has found its way into papal documents ever since the first decade of this century. Pius X, in the course of his condemnation of Modernism, insisted that greater attention be given to positive theology than had hitherto been the

¹ F. Cavallera, "La théologie positive," *Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique*, 26 (1925) 20-42.

case without, however, seeming to despise the scholastic.² This injunction occurs also in the instructions for seminaries issued during the pontificate of Benedict XV.³ In the *Deus Scientiarum Dominus* Pius XI, after claiming the principal place for theology in the ecclesiastical schools, adds that this discipline is to be treated in the positive as well as the scholastic method.⁴ The *Ordinationes* attached to this encyclical specifically direct that in the positive sections of theology the students be trained in the knowledge and interpretation of the founts.⁵ Finally, Pius XII gives what might be called the Magna Charta of positive theology in these words:

It is also true that theologians must always return to the sources of divine revelation: for it belongs to them to point out how the doctrine of the living teaching Authority is to be found either explicitly or implicitly in the Scriptures and in Tradition. Besides, each source of the divinely revealed doctrine contains so many rich treasures of truth that they can never really be exhausted. Hence it is that theology through the study of its sacred sources remains ever fresh; on the other hand, speculation which neglects a deeper search into the deposit of faith, proves sterile as we know from experience. But for this reason even positive theology cannot be on a par with merely historical science. For, together with the sources of positive theology God has given to His Church a living Teaching Authority to elucidate and explain what is concerned in the deposit of faith only obscurely and implicitly.⁶

² "Addimus heic, eos etiam Nobis laude dignos videri, qui incolumni reverentia erga Traditionem et Patres et ecclesiasticum magisterium, sapienti iudicio catholicisque usi normis (quod non aequè omnibus accidit) theologiam positivam, mutuato a veri nominis historia lumine, collustre studeant. Maior profecto quam antehac positivae theologiae ratio est habenda: id tamen sic fiat, ut nihil scholastica detrementi capiat, lique reprehendantur . . . quicumque positivam sui extollunt ut scholasticam theologiam despiciere videantur." *Pascendi*, ASS 40 (1907) 631.

³ *Enchiridion clericorum* 1107, 1133.

⁴ *Deus Scientiarum Dominus*, AAS 23 (1931) 253.

⁵ *Ordinationes*, *Ibid.*, 268.

⁶ "Verum quoque, theologis semper redeundum esse ad divinae revelationis fontes: eorum enim est indicare qua ratione ea quae a vivo Magisterio docentur, in Sacris Litteris et in divina traditione, sive explicitè, sive implicitè inveniantur. Accedit quod uterque doctrinae divinitus revelatae fons tot tantosque continet thesauros veritatis, ut numquam reapse exhauriatur. Quapropter sacrorum fontium studio sacrae disciplinae semper juvenescunt; dum contra speculatio, quae ulteriorem sacri depositi inquisitionem negligit, ut

With these authoritative utterances, there can be no doubt that the Church recognizes the concept and the importance of positive theology.

B. *Relation to Biblical Theology*

In turning to an analysis of the actual state of positive theology in the seminaries and universities, special mention must be made of courses in Scripture and biblical theology. Certainly every seminary offers Scripture courses. Although that is a part of positive theology, it has tended to become something of a specialized field in its own right. These courses seem ordinarily to be concerned with matters of general introduction, then with a specific introduction to each book—its author, purpose, literary form, composition, etc.—followed by an exegetical study of the text itself. The professor is a trained scriptural scholar and his task is to explain by the laws of hermeneutics what the inspired text means. That would seem to be the pattern of the Scripture course as it is generally, at least, presented in the seminary.

More recently, and this includes meetings of this Society,⁷ a great deal has been said about biblical theology. As a matter of fact, the original topic assigned to this seminar was "A Biblical Theology Course in Mariology." It was at the request of this writer that the Reverend President kindly consented to widen the scope of the seminar to include positive theology generally as well as the whole tract on the Incarnation. The questions originally suggested by the program committee were these: What would be the method, the order of a biblical theology course? What would be basic in it? What parts should be emphasized? It was noted too that such a course would have the advantage of a rounded presentation of biblical Mariology instead of the approach through isolated texts that is so common. These questions can still supply

experiendo novimus, sterilis evadit. Sed hac de causa theologia etiam positiva, quam dicunt, scientiae dumtaxat historicae aequari nequit. Una enim cum sacris eiusmodi fontibus Deus Ecclesiae suae Magisterium vivum dedit, ad ea quoque illustranda et enucleanda, quae in fidei depositis nonnisi obscure et velut implicite continentur." *Humani Generis*, AAS 42 (1950) 568.

⁷ See, for example, R. MacKenzie, S.J., "The Concept of Biblical Theology," *CTSA* 10 (1955) 48-66.

matter for the discussion period. For the present, it will suffice to isolate the concept of biblical theology and then to give the reasons why a course in positive theology generally would be preferable.

Briefly, it seems that biblical theology would concern itself with the study of some theological theme, Mariology, for example, as it is developed in the inspired books in which it occurs. The theme would be traced from its earliest appearance in the Old Testament to its last appearance in the New. It would be studied in the contexts where it occurs as well as in the light of the entire background of the Scripture. An attempt would be made at some sort of a synthesis of the biblical teaching on the theme and those aspects with theological implications would receive particular emphasis. Since the content of such a course would take the scriptural text as a starting point at least, and since its development would involve so much scriptural background, it is most likely that a Scripture scholar would be assigned to teach it. No doubt, many professors of Scripture already include a great deal of what may be called biblical theology in the Scripture course. One wonders, though, how many institutions present a formal course in the biblical theology, as such, of any particular tract.

If such courses are to be organized, however, there are reasons why it would seem preferable to offer a course in the entire positive theology of some one tract, such as Mariology or Christology. For one thing, positive theology is more inclusive and it would obviate the danger that the course might become—or be approached as—just another Scripture course. Biblical theology is essentially developmental, after all, and it does seem arbitrary to draw a line at the end of the scriptural development. Very often it is precisely the subsequent analyses of the Fathers and decisions of the Magisterium that are needed to unravel all the implications of a biblical theme.

Another important factor is the choice of a professor. Biblical theology would be regarded as the special province of the professor of Scripture, while there is a greater likelihood that a course in positive theology would be assigned to the professor of dogma. There are important advantages here. The professor of dogma is in a better position to incorporate the biblical development into

the structure of theology as a whole. He can better unite the scriptural and patristic presentation of a doctrine and relate both of them to the activity of the Church's magisterium. He is able also to present the positive data in such a way as to better support the superstructure of theological speculation. If the scriptural presentation suffers somewhat in this arrangement, the formal course in Scripture is an already organized means of making up any deficiency. The more general course in positive theology could serve, in fact, to close the regrettable gap that sometimes exists between scriptural studies and dogmatic theology. From the purely scholarly point of view, also, the high level that scriptural studies have attained in recent years might stimulate the rest of the positive theology to the same achievement.

C. *Theoretical Justification*

At this point it might be well to consider the question that is likely to arise in the minds of some: Why have a positive theology course in the first place? The many possible answers can be reduced to three: positive theology is theology; positive theology can perform its function in theology independently of theological speculation; and finally positive theology offers educational advantages that cannot be achieved by any other theological pursuit.

Positive theology is usually described by distinguishing it from scholastic or speculative theology, as do the pronouncements of the magisterium already cited. It has become more common recently, and it seems more accurate, to use the terms positive and speculative theology to refer to two distinct parts of the one scholastic theology. The precise function of positive theology has been well formulated by Franzelin:

[to provide] an understanding and a demonstration of *what* truths, whether theoretical or practical, are contained in the word of God, and *in what way* they are so contained, insofar as this word of God is preserved in Scripture and in tradition and is proposed by the Church. The science of the *what* and the *how* of the content of the word of God is that *dogmatic (and moral) theology* which is called *positive*.⁸

⁸ "Spectanda est haec 'amplior manifestatio' per intellectionem et demonstrationem, *quae veritates* sive theoreticae sive practicae et *quomodo* continean-

And, as he amplifies it:

The scope of this proof is ever to demonstrate that some truth is either certainly or probably contained with a determined meaning in the word of God. It should indicate, at the same time, *how* the truth is contained in the word of God.⁹

There is general agreement that this is what positive theology does.

There is less unanimity on the question of the place of positive theology in the unity of theology as a whole. This topic was an important element in the discussions that raged in the European journals of a decade ago on the nature of theology. It might be relevant to consider briefly some aspects of this problem for the light that it can throw on the nature of positive theology and the sort of thing a course in positive theology should achieve.

The more traditional view maintains that the role of positive theology in theology itself is to supply principles for theological conclusions. The demonstration of conclusions from principles would then constitute the real work of theology as science in the strict sense. The positive endeavor is justified theoretically by the fact that theology is wisdom and a wisdom has a right to defend its principles.¹⁰ Positive theology is thus engaged with principles and theology's function as wisdom; speculative theology alone is concerned with conclusions and is alone governed by the specifying formal light of the science, usually described in this view as virtual revelation.

tur in verbo Dei, prout in Scriptura ac Traditione conservatur et ab Ecclesia proponitur. Scientia haec, *quid* et *quomodo* in verbo Dei contineantur est *theologica dogmatica (et moralis)* quae dici solet *positiva*." J. Franzelin, *Tractatus de divina traditione et scriptura*, 3d ed., Rome (1882) 730.

⁹ "In hac probabitione scopus semper est demonstrare, veritatem aliquam sensu determinato contineri vel certe vel probabiliter in verbo Dei, simulque ostendere, *quomodo* veritas in verbo Dei sit proposita." *Ibid.*, *Tractatus de Deo Uno*, Rome (1883) 17.

¹⁰ Perhaps the best formulation of this view is that of F. Muniz, O.P., "De diversis muneribus sacrae theologiae secundum doctrinam divi Thomae," *Angelicum* 24 (1947) 93-123; Engl. transl. by J. Reid, O.P., *The Work of Theology*, Thomist Press, Washington, 1953. Muniz holds that theology is a potential whole, that is, one wherein the whole is in every part according to its essence but not according to its entire power or function. Thus positive theology is assigned to that potential part of theology proper to its function as a wisdom whereby it defends its principles.

Neat and satisfying as this view may seem at first, it is not without its difficulties. The enormous labor of positive theologians seems hardly proportionate to the work of supplying what are called theological principles. Their essential content can be received, as Conger points out, simply by attending to the ordinary teaching of the Church.¹¹ It is possible also to presume too strict a relation between theological principles and the sources of revelation on the one hand, and theological conclusions drawn from theological speculation on the other. As Congar points out elsewhere:

The scientific character of theology does not spring from the deduction of new truths, but rather from the rational reconstruction of the Christian teaching in such a way as to attach truths that are conclusions to truths that are principles.¹²

Thus the theological demonstration is not so much an instrument for the discovery of new truths but rather involves the process of attaching a proposition already known, perhaps even clearly revealed, to principles which manifest its real meaning and its necessity. It is in this sense that the existence of the human will of Christ, for example, becomes a theological conclusion: even though clearly revealed in itself, it is now attached to its principle, namely the fact that Christ had a perfect human nature.¹³ It is more accurate to say, therefore, that positive theology is concerned with the truths as they are found in the revealed sources, quite apart from their character as principles or conclusions; speculative theology aims at a rational construct of truths that come under the scope of revelation (*revelabilia*) by relating those that are conclusions to their own proper principles.

There is a further difficulty in connecting positive theology too closely with the defense of theological principles. It can certainly be questioned whether such a view takes into sufficient account

¹¹ Y. Congar, O.P., "Théologie," *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 15.1 (1946) 463.

¹² ". . . la qualité scientifique de la théologie ne se prend pas de la déduction de vérités nouvelles, mais de la construction rationnelle de l'enseignement chrétien par un rattachement de vérités-conclusions à des vérités-principes." *Ibid.*, "Le livre du P. Charlier," *Bulletin Thomiste* 15 (1938-9) 500.

¹³ For further development of relation of revelation to theological principles, see R. Gagnebet, O.P., "La nature de la théologie spéculative," *Revue Thomiste* 44 (1938) 231 seq.

what positive theology actually does. The strictly argumentative or defensive role of positive theology has, especially in modern times, become relatively unimportant; it is doubtful, in fact, if positive theology ever tries to "prove" or defend anything. The traditional notion seems also to ignore the constructive aspects of positive theology: the insights it gives into the meaning, communication, and transmission of revelation; the necessary background it supplies for comprehending both the inspired Scriptures and the infallible magisterium; and this says nothing of the possibility of a fruitful exercise of positive theology quite apart from any theological speculation whatever.

A realistic and acceptable analysis of the role of positive theology in the unity of theology, and one that seems more conscious of positive theology in its existential exercise without doing violence to traditional notions of science and theology, is that of Michel Labourdette.¹⁴ It is his view that the *intellectus fidei* is the principle that unifies all theology as science. He distinguishes two essential stages in theology as science: the establishment of the data, and this would be the work of positive theology; and the explication of the data which would concern speculative theology. Both stages are oriented to an understanding of the faith and so both fall under the specifying formal light of the science, the *lumen sub quo* as it is called, which is the light of reason illumined by faith.

Labourdette puts particular emphasis, therefore, on the fact that positive theology is theology, theological science *in fieri*, theology in its initial stage, but none the less theology, precisely because it is governed by the formal light of the science. Thus he says:

The establishment of data constitutes part of the science to which it furnishes the data, it is achieved in the particular light of the science; it does not depend on a common body of prior knowledge; it is, on the contrary, an absolute law of the logic of science that an observation, a "fact," concerns a science only when viewed in its light, only when subject to its critique. A bare fact is not a scientific fact.¹⁵

¹⁴ M. Labourdette, O.P., "La théologie intelligence de la foi," *Revue Thomiste* 46 (1946) 5-44.

¹⁵ "La constatation fait partie de la science à laquelle elle fournit son donné, elle se fait à sa lumière propre; elle ne relève pas d'une connaissance

He goes on to point out that no fact of any kind becomes a "meta-physical fact" until it is conceived and formulated in terms of being; a fact that took place in the past is not an "historical fact" until it has been subject to the critique and control of history. Thus it will be with theology; its revealed data, even if believed by faith, must first be subjected to the light and critique of positive theology before it can be assimilated by the science. It is the intelligence, with all its resources, and with a full awareness of the exigencies of the proper light of the science, that is applied to this task.

All of this certainly applies to the positive theologian. He is no mere historian, philologist, or exegete; neither is he an argumentative defender of "principles." He is to be distinguished, too, from the simple believer who assents to the revealed data by faith. He is engaged in the work of theological science in its initial stage. Guided by theology's formal light, he contributes in a significant way to a critical and genetic understanding of the faith. This theory seems to be the best to incorporate positive theology within the unity of the science.

This rather extended discussion on the scientific character of positive theology supplies a theoretical justification for a specialized course. But there is a further point to be made. In addition to the subtle and constant interpenetration that takes place in theology between its positive and speculative stages,¹⁶ it is possible also to isolate the exercise and the study of positive theology as an independent theological discipline. In its specialized operation, positive theology has its own methods and procedures, its own principles of operation, and its own experts. One of the dangers inherent in the ordinary presentation of the manuals is the tendency to con-

commune antérieure; c'est au contraire une loi absolue de la logique des sciences qu'une observation, un *fait*, n'intéresse une science que vu à sa lumière, critiqué par elle. Un fait brut n'est pas un fait scientifique." *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶ As Labourdette describes it: "Dans l'élaboration de la science il y a compénétration étroite de ces deux phases d'observation et d'explication; il y a un va-et-vient continu des premières constatations à une explication fragmentaire, parfois à une explication provisoire (hypothèse); puis, de l'explication à de nouvelles constatations. Il n'est certes pas nécessaire d'avoir épuisé le champ de la constatation avant d'aller à la recherche des causes." *Ibid.*

fuse the mutually dependent yet really distinct functions of scientific theology. As Cavallera remarks:

It is pure self deception to wish to settle a [speculative] controversy by the appeal to authority or to hope, by means of a subtle exegesis of this or that text, to claim the definitive patronage of a Father of the Church who wrote at a time when the problem was not as yet even under discussion.¹⁷

The techniques of the two disciplines are different and demand, in their advanced stages, different habits of thought. Again, in the words of Cavallera: "It is just as regrettable to try to evaluate the conclusions of positive theology with the habits of thought of a speculative theologian, as it to challenge the legitimacy of a speculative construction in the name of history and tradition."¹⁸ No one would deny the necessity, at the seminary level, of a sound training in the essentials of both positive and speculative theology. There is, however, no better way to impress theological students with the particular problems and techniques of positive theology than a formal and specialized course in one of its themes.

As a final point of vindication, the other values, the "fringe benefits" as it were, inherent in the positive theological enterprise should not be overlooked. Much criticism is being expressed these days about the quality of our Catholic higher education generally and of the seminary training in particular. At least one remedy might be to put more stress on positive theology. No one can deny the disciplinary values involved in the linguistic, historical, and critical studies in which a positive theologian must engage. The opportunities to develop techniques of research and habits of scholarship are limitless in this field. The ramifications with general culture and with liberal studies are also important. How many, in fact, of our seminarians have any first hand or detailed knowledge

¹⁷ "Des lors, il est absolument illusoire de vouloir trancher la controverse par voie d'autorité et d'espérer par l'exégèse subtile de tels ou tels textes, se concilier le patronage décisif d'un Père de l'Eglise, écrivant à un moment où le problème n'était pas encore en discussion." F. Cavallera, *op. cit.*, 27.

¹⁸ "Il est tout aussi dommageable de vouloir apprécier les résultats de la théologie positive avec les habitudes d'esprit d'un scolastique que de contenter la légitimité des constructions spéculatives, au nom de l'histoire et de la tradition." *Ibid.*, 36.

of Justin, Irenaeus, and Origen? of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine? of the personal and historical elements in the Councils? even, indeed, of the text of St. Thomas? Or, as is often the case, is their knowledge of these things derived from the snippets in the manuals and the summaries in the handbooks of patrology? A thorough acquaintance with the sources of faith is surely a necessary part of the Christian intelligence that a theological education aims to produce; heavy doses of positive theology are a likely means to this end.

D. Presentation of the Course

The theoretical groundwork just reviewed has prepared the way for the principal point of the present discussion: the possibility of organizing a course in the positive theology of the Incarnation. It so happens that the author has had some experience in preparing and presenting such a one semester course to advanced students on the college level. With some adaptations, the same course could be organized for presentation in the seminary. If the course could be extended to cover an entire academic year, that much more would be gained in completeness and intensity. In any case, the observations that follow describe the course as it was actually presented in the indicated circumstances.

Principles of organization

The principle of organization for any course in specifically positive theology will necessarily be the development of doctrine. It is historical science that serves as the tool for whatever understanding positive theology supplies, and historical science is by its nature genetic. There is an understanding of a revealed truth and its formulation by the magisterium that can be had only from a realization of the details of the process by which that precise formulation was achieved. The study of the development of any doctrine will involve the various stages of its revelation as well as its subsequent transmission in the Church. The scope of a course like this, therefore, includes all the relevant biblical, patristic, and magisterial data.

For the particular course to which reference is made here, the tract on the Incarnation was chosen, although other topics such as the Trinity, Mariology, the Sacraments, or the Eucharist might also serve the purpose. Certainly not every tract in theology can be taught this way, but at least one should be so treated somewhere in the theological course. The Incarnation recommends itself as the central Christian mystery; this is the essential doctrine that engages the divine in the flow of human history, an important emphasis in the course. There is an adequate Christological development in the Old Testament to warrant exploration into that area. Modern scriptural scholarship points more and more to a similar development in the apostolic community of the New Testament. The problem of Christ engaged the great Christian thinkers of the patristic period and was the central issue in the general councils throughout the whole first millennium. The Thomistic development is a masterpiece of its own kind and can be appreciated as such when studied in its historical context. The modern attitude toward Christ is a topic vital for our own day. Thus, for significant content, a wide choice of sources, and an essential engagement with history, the Incarnation seems ideally suited to the purposes of this course.

The methodology of the course would naturally be historical since history is the "handmaid" of positive theology. Stress would be put on a maximum first hand contact with the sources and a detailed analysis of the most significant of them. There is no one textbook that provides such material, and consequently the documents necessary for class lectures and discussions have to be duplicated by hectograph or some such means. In the course described these sources had necessarily to be presented in translation. On the seminary level there would be important values to be derived from an attempt to study at least some of the documents in the original languages. In any case, every attempt has to be made to engage the students personally in readings, analysis, and research.

Outline of class lectures

Listed below is the series of lectures as actually presented to a class of college juniors on the positive theology of the Incarnation.

Indicated in each case is the number of lectures devoted to each topic and the significant stages in the doctrinal development that were emphasized at each point. The course comprised thirty lectures in one semester, with two lectures being given each week.

1. *Old Testament*: (4 lectures)
 - (a) Organic development of Messianism: Israel's messianic hope from its initial link with Davidic dynasty to its ultimate eschatological expression.
 - (b) Other figures of Christ: the servant poems in Isaiah and the vision of the Son of Man in Daniel; the failure of Judaism to relate these figures to each other or to the Messiah.
 - (c) The extra-biblical expectation: the O.T. Apocrypha and Qumran.
2. *New Testament*: (3 lectures)
 - (a) Apostolic kerygma: selected sermons from Acts and St. Paul.
 - (b) Christological hymns of the N.T.
 - (c) Apostolic didache: the special emphasis of each evangelist: the relation of Mark to the oral catechesis; the soteriology and universalism of Luke; the ecclesiology and eschatology of Matthew; John's theological viewpoint; the relation of all of these to the teaching about Christ.
3. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*: (8 lectures)
 - (a) Ignatius of Antioch: personal union with Christ.
 - (b) Justin Martyr: pioneer relation of Christian revelation to Greek philosophy; Christ as fulfillment of O.T. expectation.
 - (c) Irenaeus: tradition vs. heresy; recapitulation of all things and all history in Christ.
 - (d) Tertullian: terminology on hypostatic union; the reality of the flesh of Christ and His physical appearance.
 - (e) Origen: speculative development at Alexandria.
 - (f) Dionysius of Alexandria: terminology; anti-Sabellian effort.
 - (g) School of Antioch: Paul and Lucian; rationalism; preparation for Arianism.
4. *The Arian Controversy*: (2 lectures)
 - (a) Arius, Nicaea, Athanasius: definitive formulation of consubstantiality; term of development on this question.
5. *Christological Controversies*: (6 lectures)
 - (a) Apollinaris: relation of Christ's humanity and divinity; raises the question and provides heretical answer; I Constantinople.
 - (b) Nestorianism: Cyril, Ephesus; terminological variations; Alexandria vs. Antioch; personality conflicts.

- (c) Monophysitism: Leo, Chalcedon; partisan strife; fixation of terminology on hypostatic union.
 - (d) Attempts at compromise after Chalcedon: Caesaropapism; II Constantinople; Three Chapters.
 - (e) Monotheletism: nature and operation; III Constantinople.
6. *St. Thomas and the Theology of the Incarnation*: (4 lectures)
Perfection of speculative development; its historical context.
7. *Modern problems*: (3 lectures)
- (a) Contemporary Protestant theology.
 - (b) Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

Term Assignments

In the course just presented the students were required to write one research paper each half-semester. One paper dealt with some aspect of Christ as presented in the New Testament; the other on some aspect of Christological teaching as presented by any one of the Ante-Nicene Fathers. The students were required also to outline the chapters on the Incarnation in Sheed's *Theology and Sanity* and to read through the relevant material in the *Tertia Pars* of the *Summa*. Readings were also suggested but not required in the pertinent sections of the *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Quasten's *Patrology*, and Lebreton and Zeiller's *History of the Primitive Church*.

Term Examination

The term examination was composed of three questions, all of which had to be answered. The first question required the students to identify ten selections taken from the various sources studied. They were required to give the author and approximate date of each selection and, in a sentence or two, to explain the state of Christological development that each passage represented. The second question involved a similar identification of twelve proper names important in the development of this doctrine. The third question asked for an organized essay analyzing the Thomistic theology of the Incarnation. When the papers were finally rated, of the 58 students enrolled in the course 7 failed, 7 were graded at

D, 15 at C, 15 at B, and 14 at A. It is perhaps too soon to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the course. As one great teacher has said, the only one who learns anything the first time a course is presented is the teacher. At any rate, in terms of the possibility of a course in the positive theology of some particular tract, the scholastic maxim would apply here: *ab esse ad posse valet illatio*.

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Digest of the Discussion:

Father Gerard Owens, C.Ss.R., opened the discussion and asked Brother Luke to elaborate on the positions held by Father Muniz and Father Labourdette.

Brother Luke replied that Muniz stressed the sapiential character of positive theology, whereas Labourdette described the primary function of positive theology as scientific. The latter considered reason illumined by faith as the formal light of theology and taught that this must extend to the initial establishment of the scientific data as well as to the final stage of scientific conclusion. Accordingly, theological science has an historical and a rational function; both functions are directed by reason illumined by faith.

Muniz insisted upon a distinction between the scientific and sapiential function. The work of positive theology is considered to be a function of the sapiential rather than the scientific aspect.

Father Owens noted that Brother Luke had objected that Muniz limited the function of positive theology. The basis for Brother Luke's objection was the fact that Muniz's position does not seem to envision the possibility of a revealed conclusion.

Father Owens then asked about the possibility of incorporating positive theology as an integral part in teaching theology.

Brother Luke said that the first requirement to do this is a teacher with a particular interest in positive theology. Only such an instructor would see the need that his pupils have to "experience" at least one doctrine completely in its positive sources.

Father Paul Palmer, S.J., suggested that the student must clearly distinguish between positive and speculative theology. They are both included in the term Scholastic theology. It is not possible to ignore either function.

In the seminary the work of positive theology usually takes the form of positing the data in the status quaestionis. These data are taken

from Scripture and Patristic sources. The speculative function is much more limited and the seminary fulfills it by handing on the terminology which theologians have previously determined. The proper end of purely speculative theology, i.e. attaining more knowledge of the data at hand, is rarely the work of the seminary. Father Palmer did not desire only a positive approach in the study of theology, but would include it as part of the whole study. The problem that must be faced is the practical problem of just where will the teacher of dogma set the limits to his presentation of the positive sources.

Father Romeo Trahan, S.S.E., suggested the possibility of a teacher's limiting himself to one Father or one specific work of a Father so that the student will have an appreciation of an approach to positive theology.

Father Walter Burghardt, S.J., stated that the finality involved in the course in positive theology would be the factor that first must be determined. The approach of a Patristics scholar might be theological or purely historical. Unless the formality of faith is introduced at some point, the study is not a specifically theological function. To study the patristic sources of a given doctrine is not necessarily to act as a theologian. It is possible to examine a specific doctrine during the course of six or seven centuries and to make an explication of the various texts with which he is concerned. He is not doing the work of a theologian until he is involved in the synthesis. It is necessary to carefully distinguish the role one is fulfilling—historian or theologian.

Brother Luke replied that the light of theology is reason illumined by faith. A study which is specified by this light is the work of theology.

In reply to a question from Father Owens, Father Burghardt declared that the Professor of Dogma is a positive theologian when he gives the proof from Scripture, Tradition, etc. What he is doing is giving the teaching of the Church, he is giving the tradition of the Church, since he is teaching the content of the Scripture and of the patristic writings in the sense understood by the Church.

Father Gerald Van Ackeren, S.J., noted that a biologist in his laboratory is doing properly biological work. So also, a man who is positing the data of theology is doing specifically theological work despite the fact that the work is also historical in character. The Patrologist uses the techniques of the historian but he is not merely historical. He is guided by the declarations of the Church which cast the proper light on the data. The Patrologist acts as a theologian and the historical development of a given doctrine is the laboratory of the theologian. When the theologian uses a lesser science, he must do so within the framework of the lesser science.

The discussion also touched upon:

1. The question of who should perform the work of positive theology in the seminary.
2. The need to present the background of the quotations in the manuals so as to avoid the oftentimes false impression that the quotations presented represent a cross section of a potentially great number of sources.
3. The manner of incorporating the present state of the development of a specific doctrine in the course in positive theology.

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