

Committee on Current Problems

Report of Chairman

THE first meeting of the Committee on Current Problems of the Catholic Theological Society of America was held in Room 215, Curley Hall, The Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C., on December 11, 1946. Rt. Rev. Msgr. Edward G. Murray, of St. John's Seminary, Brighton, Mass., the Chairman of the Committee, called the meeting to order at 2 p.m. Present at the meeting, in addition to Msgr. Murray, were the Reverend Doctors Matthew A. Schumacher, C.S.C., of St. Mary's College, Notre Dame, Ind.; Thomas E. Henneberry, S.J., of Woodstock College, Woodstock, Md.; Eugene M. Burke, C.S.P., and Edmond D. Benard, both of The Catholic University of America. With the approval of the Committee members, Msgr. Murray appointed Fr. Benard to act as secretary for the meeting.

The purpose of the Committee, as outlined in the Society's Constitution, was recalled by Msgr. Murray. Fr. Burke suggested that it be regarded as a function of the Committee, under its constitutional organization, to get in touch with qualified members of the Society—i.e., those with special competence in particular fields—and request that they write on specific problems of current importance in connection with their particular fields. He also suggested that it might be possible to reprint such articles by Society members (articles which would have appeared in various publications) under the aegis and imprint of the Society as a whole. It was agreed that such reprint endeavor lies properly within the province of the Committee on Publications and Research and should be referred to that Committee.

The Committee then proceeded to the discussion of current problems of special moment to Catholic theologians. Msgr. Murray stressed the fact that certain problems of "social morality" are of considerable importance at the present time—for instance, strikes in basic industries, the closed shop, the refusal of merchandisers to sell at current prices and the resultant creation of artificial scarcities.

The Committee next discussed the need, in moral theology, for the clarification of the concept of "purely penal law," which has a great deal to do with the morality of the so-called "black market" operations that were a genuine menace to public morality during World War II.

The members of the Committee were unanimous in asserting the need of a new book of casuistry—with modern examples and type-problems—as an aid to priests in the ministry. It was agreed that such a book should be a co-operative endeavor, and that it should be suggested, as a project, to the membership of the Society at the next general meeting.

The question of the various "moral systems" at present taught, under a variety of intriguing titles, in our seminaries, was next discussed, and the members of the Committee agreed on the need of some objective basic statement that would reveal the vast substratum of principle common to all orthodox systems.

Msgr. Murray brought before the attention of the Committee the problems connected with the seminary teaching of the principles and practice of Catholic Action. He asserted the need of a manual which would be theoretically sound and yet of practical use to the priest exercising his ministry in the existing conditions in the United States. It was voted to recommend to the general membership the foundation of a committee to prepare a report on the present teaching and practice of Catholic Action in the United States and to make whatever recommendations that seemed useful or necessary for the betterment of either or both aspects.

The Committee then drew up a list of problems—with brief explanations of the mind of the Committee—to be presented to the Board of Directors at their annual meeting for whatever action the Board might see fit to take. (A copy of the letter, listing and commenting on the selected problems, sent to the Reverend President of the Society by the Committee secretary, is appended to these minutes.)

The meeting adjourned at 4:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

REV. EDMOND D. BENARD,

Secretary.

January 10, 1947.

VERY REVEREND FRANCIS J. CONNELL, C.S.S.R.
President, Catholic Theological Society of America.
VERY REVEREND AND DEAR FATHER CONNELL:

The Committee on Current Problems of the Catholic Theological Society of America met in Curley Hall on December 11, 1946. Those present were Rt. Rev. Msgr. Edward G. Murray, Chairman, Rev. Matthew A. Schumacher, C.S.C., Rev. Thomas E. Henneberry, S.J., Rev. Eugene M. Burke, C.S.P., and Rev. Edmond D. Benard, who was selected to act as secretary. In obedience to the wishes of the Committee, I am forwarding the following information to you as President of the Society.

After considerable discussion, the Committee decided on the following topics as representing current problems before American Catholic theologians:

(1) *"An Authoritative Church in a Democracy."*

What Archbishop Cushing described in a letter to Msgr. Murray as the "neo-democratic mentality of returning servicemen and the University-age generation generally" poses a challenge to Catholic apologists. It demands a careful restatement of the position that the Catholic Church can and must fill in a democratic society; and an answer to those opponents of the Church who attempt to portray it as "incompatible with the American way of life," and "contrary to the spirit of tolerance and the intellectual liberty of free Americans."

(2) *"Moral Problems of Total War."*

Now that we have emerged from the stress of actual wartime, it would seem opportune for Catholic theologians to express their considered opinion on the morality of the new means and methods of warfare developed during World War II. What must be said, for instance, of the use of the atomic bomb, or saturation bombing, of economic warfare directed against civilian populations, of biological warfare, etc.?

(3) *"Is the Right to Strike Absolute?"*

The Committee has in mind particularly strikes in the so-called "basic industries"—coal, steel, transportation, etc. What

of the morality of such strikes, which would seem to some to be directed rather against the general public; how can the rights of the public, as well as of capital and labor, be protected in such disputes?

(4) "*The Problem of Catholic Action in the United States.*"

It is undeniable that there is still a great deal of confusion among American Catholics, priests and laity, concerning the forms of Catholic Action best adapted to conditions in this country, and even concerning the nature of Catholic Action. This is intensified by the fact that the classic works on the subject are of European origin and seem to be predicated on a set of environmental circumstances and on a national mentality different from our own. Would it be possible to present a treatment of Catholic Action particularly understandable to Americans, and of a practical bent based upon the peculiar problems of the American mentality and *milieu*?

(5) "*Natural Motives and the Supernatural Life.*"

This topic would seem to express the central problem of the theological discussion which has been so much to the fore in the past few years. This discussion has, of course, much more than a theoretical importance. A definite statement, if it is possible to agree upon one, would have, the Committee feels, considerable value.

(6) "*The Principles of Extra-Sacramental Justification.*"

The Committee is of the opinion that an examination of this problem, in addition to being a highly interesting *incursus* into the field of dogmatic theology, would throw additional light on the very important and practical *dictum*: "Extra ecclesiam nulla salus."

It might be noticed that topic (1) is in the field of Fundamental Dogma-Apologetics-*De ecclesia*; (2) and (3), in Moral Theology; (4) in Catholic Action, with overtones of Pastoral Theology; (5), in Ascetical Theology; and (6) in Dogmatic Theology.

Very respectfully yours in Christ,

[REV.] EDMOND D. BENARD, *Secretary*,

Committee on Current Problems, The Catholic Theological Society of America.