

SCIENTIFIC TEACHING OF DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

ACCORDING to a directive of the Executive Committee the purpose of these seminars is to provide "concrete, detailed and practical follow-ups to the over-all presentation of principles and theories as presented in the morning session." An attempt will be made to apply this directive to the present discussion. To do this we must state in general the aim in teaching Dogma since this aim will necessarily determine to a great extent the methods used to attain it.

By aim we mean primarily the *finis operis*, that is, what a course in Dogma should have as its objective. Are we assuming too much in stating very definitely that Dogma is a speculative science and that consequently the purpose of a course in Dogma should be the development of the habitus of theology in the minds of the students? In this regard the Commission set up by the Bishops of France to study the question of Seminary training reported as follows: "Dogmatic Theology should be studied as a science, for what it is in itself, with its own proper object, with every effort at erudition and at the reflexion and assimilation which it supposes. Thus will be avoided the danger of a popularization which would carry with it a lowering of the level of theological studies, as well as the danger of a too utilitarian adaptation to the need of the times."

If we do assume that the development of the habitus of theology is the aim and purpose of the course in Dogma we are naturally led to a consideration of the most effective means or method of accomplishing this end.

A brief summary should be made regarding the peculiar nature of this science: (a) as a *scientia subalternata*, and (b) as wisdom. This should introduce a discussion of the principles on which this science is based; i. e. the Sources of Revelation, their proper use in Theology, and the special role of human reason in this study.

Proper emphasis should be given to Sacred Scripture as the primary source and "the soul" of Theology. Care should be taken

to select the more important Scriptural texts bearing on each thesis and to give to them a reasonably full consideration in their context. On this point the Report of the French Bishops states: "The professor of Dogmatic Theology should connect theses with Holy Scripture not only to establish them, but to show how they spring from the Word of God, which makes them vivifying and necessary." The actual use of the Bible in class helps to impress the students that our Theology actually flows from Revealed Truth. Perhaps a closer co-operation between the professors of Scripture and Dogma would promote a more effective use of Scripture as the primary *locus theologicus*.

In this seminar it would be impossible to give due consideration to all the various organs of Tradition. However, it does seem necessary to consider two problems in this connection: the official teaching of the Church through her Solemn or Ordinary Magisterium, and the doctrine of the Fathers. These two are selected partly for their importance and partly because of their special treatment in most modern texts.

With regard to the first of these care should be taken to emphasize strongly the dogmatic decisions of the Church concerning each doctrine or thesis treated. We should be concerned primarily with what is revealed as truth and so stated by the Church, and only secondarily with opinions more or less probable. In actual practice the students should be required to know well the theological note of all the important theses. It is debatable to what extent any exact memory tasks should be imposed in this regard, but the class should certainly have some familiarity with Denzinger and the more important Dogmatic Decrees of the Councils of Trent and Vatican.

Most text-books of Dogmatic Theology are heavily weighted with opinions and quotations from the Fathers; in many cases this seems to be an encroachment on the field of Patrology. To what extent are such piece-meal quotations valuable? Should the student be required or encouraged to learn some of these carefully? Is it not possible to co-operate more closely with the professor of Patrology to enable the student of theology to acquire a better knowledge of Patristic writings in their proper settings? In any case the class should have a nodding acquaintance with Migne and with the

Enchiridion Patristicum of de Journal. The new English Translation of the Fathers now in progress may prove helpful in the more effective use of these sources. However does it not seem true that an attempt to emphasize the vast amount of material available from tradition in support of any dogmatic thesis would lead practically to the adoption of the Positive in preference to the Scholastic method in Theology?

In the scientific and scholastic method of studying Dogma human reason naturally plays a most important role. The *objectum formale quo* of this science is virtual revelation and it seems that a large portion of the actual time in class should be devoted to this phase of the work: the development of theological truths in relation to their revealed sources. Indeed should not this be the very heart of a scientific course in Dogma? However, while emphasizing this aspect of dogma care must be taken at the same time not to consider this rational process as an end in itself. It is possible to become so engrossed in the structure of the syllogism that we lose sight of the true object, the Divine Truth under consideration.

And at this point we come face to face with a most important problem, that of a suitable text-book to aid us in this task. Is it not true that many authors devote but little space and attention to the actual theological reason? There is definitely a great contrast between such treatment in these texts and the method of the *Summa Theologica*. But could the *Summa* be considered as the ideal text or even better than the texts now in use? It seems that consideration should be given in this regard to Canon 1366, No. 3—to its precise meaning and obligatory force. A survey of some of the better manuals available might also be profitable at this stage.

A general and probably legitimate criticism that is levelled at all grades of teaching today is that students are over-taught, that the teacher monopolizes the attention and time of the class and that the students play a merely passive role. Is not this often true of our classes in Theology? A suggested remedy is the assignment of particular problems or projects to various groups in the class for special study and research and a report of their findings to the assembled class. This could be a regular assignment with one longer period each week devoted to the report and discussion of the prob-

lem. In this manner the students can be introduced to a variety of sources at first hand: Scriptural texts and commentaries, the writings of the Fathers, liturgical sources, current periodicals, etc. Moreover this develops a more active participation and a keener interest in the actual theological problem—an interest which in many cases will carry over into post-ordination days.

The lecture method, the daily assignments of work to be prepared, frequent tests and examination, the division of the course into treatises, etc. are also problems which merit discussion in this meeting, if time permits.

It was assumed at the outset that the primary aim, the *finis operis*, of our courses in Dogmatic Theology is definitely speculative. May we say that it is exclusively so, or may we assign at least some practical ends as *fines operantis*; i. e. other objectives which the professor may keep in mind (and before the students) as an outgrowth of the development of the true habitus of Theology? In this connection there seem to be two such objectives which merit consideration: (a) the spiritual formation of the student in so far as this may be fostered by his study of Dogma, and (b) the preparation of the student for his apostolic work as a priest. Some claim that the first of these objectives lies beyond the limits of the course in Dogma and outside the province of the professor of Dogma; others hold a quite contrary opinion. The Report of the French Bishops states: "Dogmatic Theology should be taught as a living and not as a merely abstract science or a dry and withering speculation, because it is, of its very nature, the science of life "par excellence," the Divine Life; and because it is meant for the highest expression of life, the life of union with God from which priestly action must derive." To what extent should the professor of Dogma ordain his teaching to such an end as is here expressed? Will carefully selected and assigned supplementary reading from sound authors be sufficient?

With regard to the second objective, the preparation of the student for his priestly work, there is also a sharp difference of opinion. Many hold that this falls entirely within the scope of Moral and Pastoral Theology; it has no place in Dogma. Others, especially many modern French writers, claim that the absence of such

living, practical aims is a major weakness in our seminaries. They point to the work of *Les Missions de France*, and the new programme of the Seminary at Lisieux as indications of what may be done to remedy this defect. On this point Bishop de Bazilaire says: "We censure it [the teaching of Theology] severely for being too bookish, for demanding more from the memory than from the intelligence, for presenting truth in disjointed segments, for making the head work more than the heart, for being turned toward the past rather than toward the future, for so presenting doctrine that it appears as dry bones rather than living flesh." Cardinal Suhard in his encyclical "Growth or Decline" writes in the same vein: "From Theology, which is not a thing completed like revelation, . . . [is demanded] an attempt at synthesism and realism which will place the major dogmas of Christianity at the center and within the reach of the spiritual life of this century."

Such statements certainly seem to emphasize the necessity of giving a social and practical bent to our courses in Dogma. Can this be done without sacrificing or at least jeopardizing the achievement of the primary end which is purely speculative?

In this brief outline an attempt has been made to set forth a few of the practical problems which confront the professor of Dogmatic Theology. It is fully realized that all of them cannot be considered in the short time allotted to this Seminar. It is hoped, however, that the mere raising of the difficulties may be a step towards their ultimate solution.

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Digest of Discussion

Father Coughlin stressed especially the use of the Summa of St. Thomas as a text, and the active participation of the students in the lectures.

Father Thomas U. Mullaney O.P., opened the discussion by inquiring as to active participation of the students. Father Coughlin replied that there was almost continuous student participation during the four hours allotted.

Father Mullaney also asked if this were not inadequate for the development of a scientific habit of theology and suggested the utility of a theological system for developing such a habit. Father Coughlin answered that he was in favor of the exclusive use of the Summa during the four year course of Dogmatic Theology and had found this satisfactory over his seventeen years of teaching the subject.

Father Gerald Owens, C.S.S.R., stated that he thought the lecture method, used preponderantly, with less time for student participation, was more effective in a subject such as Dogmatic Theology. This was corroborated by Father Shea of Boston, who considered that Father Coughlin's method would be too slow for the matter that had to be covered. Father Burkhardt, S.J., questioned the covering of the matter by this method, and stated his preference for the use of a manual. Father Mullaney expressed his view in favor of the use of a manual, in addition to the use of the Summa, for the formation of the "habitus theologicus." Father Thomas A. Brophy S.J., reiterated the difficulty of covering the matter otherwise.

Father Greene, West Baden College, suggested the need of solid Scriptural argumentation in Dogmatic Theology, supplemented by good biblical theology incorporated in a manual. Monsignor Murray of Boston spoke of science involving an inquiry, as exemplified in St. Thomas. Father Coyle C.S.S.R., of Oconomowoc, Wis., called attention to Father Sigmund's article in the *Biblical Quarterly*, as conceding that there was no wholesale misuse of Scriptural texts by dogmatic theologians, and that on the other hand the scripture scholars had not been giving sufficient development to the theological content of Scripture. He suggested the project of checking over the scriptural arguments in the manuals in view of the data of scriptural studies.

Father McKenzie of West Baden spoke of the unavailability of up-to-date material in the field of Biblical Theology by Catholic authors. Father McGuinness, O.P., referred to the works of Ceupens and Vosté. Father Sweeney, S.J., suggested that considerable help as to availability of material in this matter can be effected by collaboration between the professors of Sacred Scripture and Dogmatic Theology. Returning to the original theme of the dis-

cussion, he expressed himself in favor of the lecture method in order that the pupils first obtain a reasonable grasp of the subject, since it is necessary for them to obtain the right idea from the very first, especially in Theology.

Father Shea of Boston spoke of the use of Scripture and expressed a word of caution in regard to the rejection of the multiple sense of Scripture.

Father Carlson, O.P., spoke of the Scholastics' use of Scripture and explained how their figurative usage of it could be justified and explained that their merit lay in the theological penetration of the text.

Father Lonergan, S.J., of Toronto, spoke of the ambiguity of the question in regard to a "proof" from Scripture and of the methods of using Scripture and interpreting it. He also emphasized that the habitus of theology was formed over the course of the four years allotted, and suggested the method of selected questions.

Father McGuinness spoke of the nature of theology as a body of organized conclusions, strictly deduced and queried as to the place of opinion in theology. Father Lonergan replied that the science of theology is not only in regard to certain conclusions but in regard to non-exclusive hypotheses as well—that it is "*fides quaerens aliquam intelligentiam.*"

Father Murray, S.J., asked whether there can be had a concept that will embrace both positive and speculative theology. Father Lonergan, S.J., spoke of the fundamental difference between the theological method and the positive, scientific, experimental method.