

SCIENTIFIC TEACHING OF FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

THE discussion topic for the seminar is "*The Scientific Teaching of Fundamental Theology*." The purpose of this seminar is a discussion of the methods, problems, sources, textbooks, organization of material, relationship amongst the various sections of fundamental theology.

Conformably to this program, let us proceed from the general to the particular. It seems best to couch this prospectus in the form of questions and answers. The answers are my own and are open for discussion. Other questions without answers are placed at the end. Further questions may be in the minds of the participants in the seminar or may arise in the course of our discussion.

A. FUNDAMENTAL THEOLOGY

1. What is the *purpose* of Fundamental Theology within the framework of Theology in general? It is a necessary *introduction* to the fruitful study of Theology; practically it consists in proving Denzinger n. 1792 by the light of reason.

2. Does Fundamental Theology suppose *philosophy*? Yes, in both the teacher and the pupil.

3. Does it also suppose *theology*? Not in the pupil, but in the teacher.

4. Does it suppose the *Catholic faith*? Not *per se*.

5. Is Fundamental Theology necessary for *Catholic laymen*? Not *per se*, but advisable under present conditions, especially for college students and professional men.

6. Has Fundamental Theology a *method* of its own? Yes, the apologetic method.

7. How does this method *differ* from the philosophical and the theological or dogmatic method? We may put it this way: Philosophy argues *sine fide*, theology *ex fide*, the apologetic method *ad fidem*.

8. Does not the apologetic method gradually *pass over* into the dogmatic? Yes. After a truth of faith has been established apologetically, we base further arguments on it. But the fully dogmatic argument is not reached until the end of Fundamental Theology.

9. Which are the *principal parts* of Fundamental Theology? Apologetics and the two Sources of Revelation.

10. Is not the treatise *De Fide* also a part? No. That treatise supposes Fundamental Theology. Its every thesis is based on Tradition and Scripture as sources of revelation.

B. APOLOGETICS

11. What is the *purpose* of Apologetics? To prove that the living magisterium of the Catholic Church is the rule of faith.

12. How does this proof proceed? Step by step—in a unilinear chain of propositions.

13. Which are these steps? The following six: (a) Some notions involved in Denzinger n. 1792. (b) The possibility of revelation. (c) The divinity of Christ. (d) The institution of a Church by Christ. (e) The Catholic Church. (f) The rule of faith.

14. Are these steps necessary? Though there are other lines of reasoning (e.g., Denzinger n. 1794), this is the *common procedure* today.

I. Notions

15. Which are the notions to be inserted at the beginning of Apologetics? Revelation and mystery, faith and dogma.

16. What is to be done with them at this initial stage? The teacher proposes merely their *Catholic definitions* and common divisions.

17. Does not this suppose the Church? It supposes that the teacher knows the Catholic meaning of these terms; it does not suppose the *truth* of the Catholic Church.

18. Should not "religion" be one of these notions? Religion has already been treated in philosophy (Ethics). But it might do no harm to repeat the philosophical concept.

19. Should not "miracle" be one of these notions? Miracles have already been treated in philosophy (Cosmology).

II. *Revelation*

20. Would it not be better to prove first the *fact* of revelation and then deduce its possibility? Some (e. g. Pesch) do that. But our process seems preferable for many reasons.

21. What about the *necessity* of revelation? It may be taken, but is not really necessary for the purpose of Apologetics.

III. *Divinity of Christ*

22. Which are the *steps* by which the divinity of Christ is proved in Apologetics? (a) The historical books of the New Testament are first proved to be substantially trustworthy. Then we prove that, according to them, Christ (b) claimed to be the Son of God, and (c) proved His claim to be true.

23. Does the first step of this argument suppose the *inspiration* of the New Testament? No.

24. How did Christ prove his claim to be *true*? By His wisdom and sanctity, His miracles and prophecies, especially by His resurrection. There is also the argumentum *ex absurdis*.

25. What is the *evidential value* of the single arguments? This may be open to discussion, but all of them together furnish an invincible argument.

26. In trying to prove the divinity of Christ, do we not try to prove a *mystery*? From the validity of Christ's own testimony we prove that this mystery (the God-Man) *exists*, but we do not try to fathom this mystery, as does the treatise *De Verbo Incarnato*. See my article in *Theological Studies*, 1943, pp. 369-384.

27. Is it not sufficient for Apologetics to prove that Christ was a *divine legate* or the Messiah promised to and expected by the Jews? No. See the same article.

28. Is it nevertheless advisable for Apologetics to prove that Christ was the Messiah? Yes.

IV. *The Church*

29. What attributes of the Church does Apologetics prove? Its infallibility, perpetuity, necessity, hierarchy.

30. Why prove only these? Because they are necessary and sufficient for the peculiar purpose of *Apologetics*.

31. What about the other attributes? They belong to the *dogmatic* part of De Ecclesia.

32. Is it possible, (a) theoretically and (b) practically, to *separate* the dogmatic part of De Ecclesia from the apologetic? Yes. The only practical difficulty is that the whole of De Ecclesia is generally assigned to first year theology.

V. *The Catholic Church*

33. How is the Catholic Church *defined* at this stage? A nominal definition suffices.

34. What precisely is to be proved in this section of Apologetics? That the Catholic Church is and has been the Church instituted by Christ.

35. How is this proved? The simplest proof is through the *primacy* (via romanitatis). But there are other proofs: Notes, miracles, (D 1794).

36. In what does the argument from *miracle* consist? It shows that God has always worked miracles (physical, intellectual, moral) in favor of the Catholic Church.

37. Does this argument suppose the existence of Christ and the trustworthiness of the Gospels? No.

VI. *Rule of Faith*

38. What is meant by the rule of faith? The norm by which I know what I must believe as a Catholic (de fide divina et catholica).

39. What is the rule of faith? The voice of the living magisterium.

C. SOURCES OF REVELATION

40. Why not call this section "*Loci Theologici*" as did Melchior Cano? Because it is meant principally for *positive* theology. Cano's 10 loci theologici pertain to the whole of theology.

41. What is the purpose of this section? To prove the *dogmatic value* of Tradition and Scripture.

42. In what order should the two sources be taken? First, Tradition, then Scripture.

43. Why? Because the dogmatic value of Tradition can be proved without Scripture as Scripture, but not vice versa, except imperfectly.

I. Tradition

44. What is the best *definition* of Tradition? The preaching of the magisterium through the centuries.

45. Does this definition disregard the Fathers, theologians, faithful? No, because their teaching or expressions of faith receive dogmatic value from the approbation of the magisterium.

46. Which are the *documents* of Tradition? The documents which contain the teaching of the magisterium itself, the works of the Fathers and Theologians, the documents by which the faithful manifested their faith.

47. What is the meaning of "oral tradition" and "merely oral tradition"? They must not be taken too literally. "Oral tradition" is "revelation handed on, but not contained in Scripture"; "merely oral tradition" is "revelation handed on, but in no way contained in Scripture."

48. Can or must we Catholics admit *evolution of dogma*? We can and must. But it is better to speak of *development* of doctrine or dogma.

49. Does development of dogma mean that we understand revelation better than did the *Apostles*? No, except *secundum quid*.

II. Scripture

50. What are the principal parts of this section? Canon, Inspiration, Hermeneutics, Authenticity.

51. Should the canon of Scripture be established prior to inspiration? Yes.

1. Canon

52. How does *canonicity* differ from inspiration? Inspiration means that a book has God for its principal author; canonicity means

(a) *in actu primo* that the book is intended by God for the (synagogue or) the Church as a source of revelation, (b) *in actu secundo* that the Church recognizes this fact.

53. Is our Bible *complete*? Yes. See my article in Theological Studies—1945—pages 206-228.

54. If the original text of St. Matthew's Gospel were to turn up, would it replace our Greek text? Yes, but the Greek text would not be discarded. See same article.

2. Inspiration

55. Which of the following formulas is *best suited* to express the peculiar character of the Bible: The Bible (a) has God for its author, (b) is divinely inspired, (c) is the word of God, (d) is the written word of God, (e) is dictated by the Holy Ghost? Each formula is good, but expresses the complete notion only partially.

56. Can the inspiration of the Bible be *proved* from the Bible itself? No, at least not fully.

57. Is there a difference between a *prophet* or *Apostle* and an inspired writer? Yes. Prophets and Apostles were *conscious* of the divine command to preach certain things; the inspired writer need not have been conscious of his inspiration.

58. Most likely, *St. Paul* wrote many other letters besides the 14 canonical ones. Was he inspired in all of them? No, not if inspiration is taken in the technical sense.

59. Can we admit that the Bible contains (a) positive *defects*, (b) *historical novels*, (c) *fables*, (d) *myths*? Not without careful definitions and qualifications.

60. Is concordism to be recommended? No.

3. Hermeneutics

61. Is the *sensus plenior* of Scripture to be admitted, and if so, is it the word of God? Yes.

62. Is the *sensus consequens* of Scripture the word of God? No.

63. Is the *analogy of faith* a negative or a positive norm of interpretation? It is both.

64. What is the present opinion of theologians on the *multiple* sense of Scripture? They reject it as unworthy of God.

65. Are all interpretations of the magisterium infallible? No. Some are merely authentic.

4. Authenticity

66. If we take "authenticity" to mean "conformity of a copy with the autograph," what is the authenticity (a) of our Hebrew Bible, (b) of the originally Greek books of the Septuagint, (c) of the Greek New Testament? In general, their conformity is substantial, but not down to the last word or letter.

67. What is the critical value (a) of the Septuagint and (b) of the Vulgate as translations? They are substantially accurate and contain no errors in faith or morals.

68. Why and how far did Pius XII, in his Encyclical "Divino afflante Spiritu," urge the use of the *original text* of the Bible? (a) Because all translations are imperfect. (b) Everywhere except where the Church prescribes something else.

D. OTHER POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

69. How much cognizance should Apologetics take of the objections of *rationalists*?

70. Is *grace* needed to see the evidence of Apologetics?

71. What is the relation of scientific Apologetics to *convert-making*?

72. Have books like Conway's *Question Box* or Krull's *Christian Denominations* anything to do with scientific Apologetics?

73. Are not all theses proved in Apologetics also proved *dogmatically*?

74. What is to be said of the recent attacks (Thils, Jugie) on the argument from the *Notes* of the Church?

75. What is the rule of faith for the Pope?

76. When modern theologians *dispute* about development of dogma, on what do they agree and where do they disagree?

77. Is everything in *Denzinger de fide*?

78. Is everything in the *Baltimore Catechism* de fide?
79. What is the difference between the Bible and the catechism?
80. What is the relation between the Bible and the magisterium?

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Digest of Discussion

The Seminar on the Scientific Teaching of Fundamental Theology, conducted by Reverend Anthony Cotter, S.J., was attended by twenty members of the Society. Reverend Clement Fuerst, S.J., Vice-President of the Society, presided.

Father Cotter opened the Seminar with a brief introduction, based upon the outline of major questions in Fundamental Theology which had been drawn up by him and distributed to the members.

The first point to be treated was the definition of Tradition, with Father Gerard Yelle, S.S. and Father Malachi Donnelly, S.J. taking leading parts in the discussion. Father George Ring, S.J. and Father Cotter commented upon the certitude proper to Apologetics. Father Cotter and Father Malachi Donnelly discussed the proper use in Apologetics of historical testimonies from the early centuries of the Christian era. Father Gerard Yelle and Father Cotter exchanged views on the question of the proof of the divinity of Christ in Apologetics, with Father Cotter maintaining that it is the central point of the whole historical treatment of the person and claims of Christ, and Father Yelle being of the opinion that a specific thesis proof of the divinity of Christ does not necessarily fall within the scope of the strict Apologetical process.