

## THE PREPARATION OF A LAY APOSTLE

INSTEAD of reading a prepared paper, Father Farrell conducted the Dogma Seminar informally. The method of presentation led to lively discussion, of which the following is a synopsis made by one of these present.

The problem under consideration was presented thus: How should a lay person be prepared for apostolic work? The question demands careful treatment, for two reasons. (a) Man has a social nature, and by that very fact is inclined to give himself to others, to work for their good. As an image of God, he has an innate tendency to imitate God not only in his being, but also in his activity, that is, acting in the manner of a perfect agent in distributing to others, without loss, whatever spiritual goods he himself possesses. This tendency is strengthened by Christ's command to preach the Gospel to the whole world. (b) The apostolate involves dangerous work. To labor for others is to exercise the virtue of mercy, a quality proper to superiors and most of all to God. Hence the apostle may be tempted to think that the ministry itself, without personal sanctity, makes one pleasing to God and advances one along the road to salvation. There is therefore in the apostolate the danger of pride, against which one must be prepared by ever increasing humility, the realization that all one accomplishes is from God and from Him alone.

To these principles the seminar group agreed without demur. It was also accepted as evident that the field of the lay apostolate is reducible to the "works of mercy," and that the principal preparation should be for four of the spiritual works: correction of the erring, instruction of the ignorant, counseling of the doubtful, and prayer for the living and the dead. These, all agreed, are the chief spiritual works in which lay people can engage. But, as St. Thomas notes, not all Christians, not even all good Christians, have the qualities necessary for fruitful dedication to these tasks. It is clear that, at least for the first three, some definite intellectual preparation is necessary.

In order to lead to a discussion of this preparation, Father Farrell asked the question, How can one Christian act on another, so as to bring that other closer to God? In scholastic phraseology, what are the various types of causality involved in influencing others in a Christian way? Since the *material* cause is the soul or character of the person to be influenced, it need not receive special consideration. The *formal extrinsic* or *exemplary* cause is the good example of a Christian life. With regard to *final* causality, every practicing Catholic holds up before the eyes of the world something that is good and consequently attractive—the virtuous character of his own life.

Making a concession to some of those present, Father Farrell divided efficient causality into moral and physical. From the viewpoint of *moral efficient* causality, the only means by which one Christian can influence a person spiritually is to pray for him. He will do this the more efficaciously, the closer he himself is to God, since God hears more readily those whom He loves more dearly.

The seminar leader began to encounter vigorous objections when he affirmed that the Christian can exercise true or *physical efficient* causality only when he performs one of the first three spiritual works of mercy: only when he admonishes or instructs or counsels. Then and then alone is the Christian truly a lay apostle, since only then is he actually *doing something to another* which disposes the latter for divine activity.

A long and animated discussion of this point followed. Most of the group finally admitted the point which Father Farrell wished to make. It seems that the difficulties arose from problems and doubts of some of those present about the various types of causes and their precise distinction, especially the distinction between efficient and final, and between principal and instrumental causality. There was also hesitancy in accepting the Thomistic doctrine that the teacher is a true cause of knowledge, exerting dispositive and instrumental, but nevertheless genuine physical efficient causality.

It was further emphasized that prayer and personal goodness, while they are of primary importance, and indeed an indirect preparation for the lay apostolate, are not of themselves sufficient. For a fruitful ministry, the lay person must have some communicable grasp

of his Faith. For his personal sanctification, he needs of course the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost; but for the sanctification of others, he needs those supernatural gifts which are called the *gratiae gratis datae*. Of these there is an excellent treatment in St. Thomas' *Summa Theologica*; cf. especially Ia-IIae, q. 111, art. 4 and 5; IIa-IIae, q. 177, art. 1 and 2.

In the natural order, a teacher can do nothing but cause dispositions in his pupils, by presenting the raw materials which their minds must turn into knowledge. Likewise in the supernatural order, the *gratiae gratis datae* enable the apostle only to cause in his hearers certain dispositions for God's direct and immediate action.

The lay apostle, then, must not only sanctify himself; he must likewise increase in wisdom and knowledge, praying perseveringly for those *gratiae gratis datae* which he needs in order to supplement his insufficiency. Neither infused contemplation nor the graces of the sacrament of confirmation are *per se*, sufficient preparation. What is really necessary is orderly and complete instruction in the science of the Faith—in other words, in theology.

Such instruction is already being given in many of our colleges, in study groups, in special lecture groups that are active in various parts of the country. But over and above all this, some sort of program should be instituted for the remaining large number of Catholics who are hungry for a deeper knowledge and understanding of their Faith.

The remainder of the discussion centered about the teaching of theology in Catholic colleges. This problem has been treated several times by Father Farrell, e.g., in the *Bulletin* of the National Catholic Educational Association for August, 1946, and in the *Catholic Educational Review* for May, 1950. The following is a digest of the principal matters discussed by the seminar group.

(1) One of the Fathers present asked why, in some of our colleges, there is such a lack of interest in the "Religion courses." Three answers were suggested. (a) Catholic college students think that they know all about their religion. (b) The courses are not taught in an orderly and evident sequence, nor are they integrated with the rest of the curriculum. Particularly in this latter point,

our schools have a grave responsibility toward their students. (c) Far too many Catholics have the idea that "Religion" consists only in Ethics and Apologetics. They have never been given an opportunity to see the close relation between dogma and moral; and their college courses for the most part omit entirely the theological courses on the theological and moral virtues, or present them in a negative approach.

(2) It cannot be denied that our American young people have a deep thirst for theology; too many of them find nowhere to slake that thirst. In teaching any other science, educators realize the necessity of inculcating *the habit of the science* in their students; they fail, alas, to realize the fundamental importance of doing the same in "Religion" and theology. They also fail at times to grasp the fact that "Religion" or theology courses must be taught as an intellectual discipline, not simply as incitement to piety.

(3) This led to a discussion of the *objective* of a course in theology. Several members of the group deplored the present condition of the science of theology which sees various groups holding widely divergent views on the very nature and objectives of theology itself. Such views necessarily cause differences in opinion as to the objectives of a college course in that science. The following approaches were suggested by those present: the psychological, adapted to the immediate needs and interests of the students; the scriptural, using the Bible as the background and foundations for dogmatic and moral conclusions; the historical and Patristic; and the scientific or theological. It was agreed that the question of approach and method is paramount among educators on the college level, and that solutions of it are being attempted in almost every Catholic college.

On his part, Father Farrell maintained that the objective of the course should be to give the students the habit of theology, that is, the ability to reason logically from principle to conclusion in both dogmatic and moral matters. Hence the primary objective of the college course should be identical with the primary objective of the seminary course, and with all the other collegiate courses. "Religion courses" in our Catholic colleges should have a collegiate

objective. Naturally, the secondary objectives of college and seminary courses in theology will differ.

(4) In regard to order, Father Farrell maintained—although not without contradiction from a few of the group—that the course should begin with the consideration of God, His existence, nature, and attributes, following throughout the plan of St. Thomas' *Summa Theologica*. One should begin with the beginning. The object of Faith is not Christ, but Veritas Prima, and the object of theology is neither Christ nor the Mystical Body nor the Sacraments, but *Deus ut Deus*, as He is knowable to reason enlightened by Faith. To proceed in any other order would be equivalent, in mathematics, to teaching Trigonometry before Algebra and Geometry.

(5) So far as duration is concerned, it would seem best to devote as much time to the course as the College could allow according to accrediting regulations. Some colleges were mentioned which allow six credits a year for four years (three credit hours a week). This matter of time, however, is not essential, since a well prepared teacher could give his students the habit of theology in far less time, by indicating the basic principles of each tract together with one or two conclusions which derive from the application of those principles.

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