

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS:

### THE PROFESSIONAL THEOLOGIAN—AN INSTRUMENTAL CAUSE IN THE *Ecclesia Docens*

As I understand it, the objective of a presidential address is to keynote the convention. Apropos of this objective, and of my theme, permit me to quote briefly from the Minutes of our 1961 convention, at Ottawa. "The president-elect then recommended that we pray for one another in our formality as members of the CTSA, intent as we are now, upon our future, distinctive aureoles as theologians."<sup>1</sup>

A theologian's aureole is a special feature of his accidental beatitude. It has the aspect of an appropriate reward, it is a divine recognition of the contribution made by the theologian to the Church Militant and, therefore, to the Church Triumphant. How does the theologian merit that reward? What entitles him to that divine recognition? There must be an answer to the question—an answer that appeals to the Divine Teacher, as an adequate reason for the recompense prophesied by Daniel: "They that are learned shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that instruct many to justice, as stars for all eternity."<sup>2</sup> The Divine Teacher Himself has assured us: "He that shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."<sup>3</sup>

I venture to formulate the answer to the question as follows. The professional theologian is a human instrument divinely attuned, an active member—not only of the *Ecclesia Discens*, but also of the *Ecclesia Docens*. In relation to the hierarchy, the position of the theologian in the economy of the Teaching Church is auxiliary, subsidiary, but notwithstanding that subordination, his contribution is professionally reliable, influential, invaluable. My endeavor to locate, within the structure of the Church Militant, the proper niche of the theologian is not a case of wishful thinking. Rather it is an identi-

<sup>1</sup> P. 181.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel 12:3.

<sup>3</sup> Matt: 5:19

fiable application of the providential strategem so often referred to as divine-human instrumentality. It is not an attempt to inflate his importance. Rather, it is an endeavor to clarify and to emphasize the important vocation attested to by the Apostle: "And God indeed hath set some in the Church: first, apostles; secondly, prophets; thirdly, doctors."<sup>4</sup>

Because of limitation of time, I am constrained to continue as I began. To a synoptic extent and in headline style, I intend to touch upon five points. The first: The psychological priority of teaching in the Church Militant. The second: The consist of the *Ecclesia Docens* and of the *Ecclesia Discens*—the personnel who belong to each. The third: The notion and the fact of divine-human instrumentality, as applicable to the hierarchy. The fourth: That divine-human instrumentality, as applicable to the Fathers of the Church and to their successors, the theologians. The fifth: A balanced relation of the theologians to the *Ecclesia Sanctificans*.

First: The psychological priority of teaching in the Church Militant.

It is impossible to have a Church Ruling and a Church Sanctifying without a Church Teaching. Why? *Nil volitum nisi praecognitum*. Unless, and until we have convinced human intellects, we cannot persuade human hearts. Hence, to rule intelligently, to sanctify intelligently, we must first of all teach. In order that the official teaching of the Church be foolproof, the Founder of Christianity delegated to that Church a share of His own infallibility. That prerogative, naturally divine, is the yardstick whereby we measure the importance of the Church as a Teacher.

Secondly: The consist of the *Ecclesia Docens* and of the *Ecclesia Discens*—the personnel who belong to each.

The very mention of an official teaching element within the Church bespeaks a corresponding element who are obligated to learn, to accept guidance in a spirit of docility. Making due allowance for the *Sensus Communis Fidelium* as a criterion of our holy Faith, and for their so-called passive infallibility or *infallibilitas in*

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor: 12:28.

*credendo*, it is the faithful at large who, characteristically belong to the *Ecclesia Discens*. Making allowance for the fact that, with due qualification, the theologians pertain also to the *Ecclesia Docens*, they are included among the personnel of the *Ecclesia Discens* because, together with the faithful at large, they too depend upon the guidance and approval of the infallible element of the Teaching Magisterium.

Unquestionably, the most characteristic personnel of the *Ecclesia Docens* are they who, alone, are graced with infallible reliability—in a word, the hierarchy of apostolic succession.

However, we submit that, although in an auxiliary, subsidiary capacity, the personnel of the *Ecclesia Docens* is integrated by the inclusion of the theologians. From Baptism to Extreme Unction, the supernatural health of the Church Militant depends, in very, very large measure, upon the training of our candidates for the priesthood. The ratio between their orthodoxy and the orthodoxy of the faithful at large is obvious. And the training of the Second Christ is entrusted, above all, to the theologian, the teacher of the Queen of the Sacred Sciences. The theologian is delegated by and is answerable to the *Ordinarius Loci* or to the *Ordinarius Personarum*. The voice of the theologian simply must be a true echo of the *Vox Ecclesiae Docentis*.

Thirdly: The notion and the fact of divine-human instrumentality, as applicable to the hierarchy.

It seems reasonable to say that, instrumental causality was a favorite topic of the Angelic Doctor. His applications of that concept to the supernatural economy are fascinating.

An instrumental cause must have, inherent in itself, a fitness, a potential for the task in hand. Because of that fitness, the principal cause employs one instrument rather than another. For example, because of the juxtaposition of the blades and their sharpness, a shears is adapted for cutting. As an instrument, it is ideally suited—but only under the guidance of the hand, the eye, the mind of the tailor. Both causes, the principal and the instrumental, cooperate to produce the garment.

Instrumental causality explains the efficacy of the sacramental

system. God's own masterpiece of divine-human instrumentality, so enthused over by the Abbot Vonier in his *Personality of Christ* is the hypostatic union, whereby the Humanity of Christ became the conjoined, animated instrument of divinity.

To the immediate point: We find this teamwork of causal factors exemplified in the case of the hierarchy, as the infallible voice of the Church. To their own intellectual, instrumental exertion, there is conjoined as a principal causal factor, the divinely guaranteed intervention of the Holy Spirit, lest they err and thereby fail the *Ecclesia Credens et Discens*. The hierarchy are supernaturally attuned as human instruments of the Divine Teacher.

Fourthly: That divine-human instrumentality as applicable to the Fathers of the Church, and to their successors—the theologians.

In any reference to the reliability of the pioneer Fathers of the Church, we are alert to the fact that, although a majority of them were members of the hierarchy, an impressive minority were not. For example, Justin Martyr and Prosper of Aquitaine were laymen. Ephraim the Syrian was a deacon. Others who were not bishops include Jerome, John Damascene, Venerable Bede. An elastic computation of antiquity would permit the addition of Bernard of Clairvaux. Parenthetically, we advert to the fact that, several doctors of the Church did not pertain to the hierarchy—not even Thomas of Aquin.

Hence, the basis for the trustworthiness of a Father of the Church, as such, or of a Doctor of the Church, as such, does not postulate his inclusion within the hierarchy. In the case of the Father, that basis calls for antiquity, and in the case of the Fathers and the Doctors, for orthodox learning, sanctity, plus approbation by the Church Infallible. And that basis is the inherent fitness of the Fathers and of the Doctors of the Church as instrumental causes, engaged providentially by the Holy Spirit—the Principal Cause in the *Ecclesia Docens*.

Now, if—*contra factum*—the *Ecclesia Docens* had no successors to the Fathers of the Church, that lack would be a privative lack.

To the point, the Angelic Doctor has observed: "*In aliquo quod pertinet ad Ecclesiae utilitatem, Spiritus Sanctus non deficit.*"<sup>5</sup>

One outstanding contribution of theologians to the doctrinal progress of the Church is their cooperation with the solemn magisterium, whether in an ecumenical council, as provided for in Canon 223 of the *Code of Canon Law*; or, with the Vicar of Christ on the occasion of a papal pronouncement. The spadework undertaken and accomplished by the theologians, "*pro Ecclesia et Pontifice,*" has been accorded official recognition down through the centuries. For example, there is the glowing tribute to scholastic theologians for their human radiation of divine knowledge, to be found within the *Aeterni Patris* of Leo XIII who, to the same effect, quotes His predecessor, Sixtus V.<sup>6</sup>

In his volume contributed to *The Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, Henri Rondet, S.J., observes, in reference to doctrinal development: "While it was the work of the Fathers of the Council (of Trent) it was also, as in the case of the Vatican Council, later on, the work of the theologians who, in commissions, prepared the material. . . . Anyone who has the courage to plunge into the great volumes of the *Acts of the Council* cannot fail to be filled with admiration for the inconspicuous work of the theologians."<sup>7</sup>

In his volume contributed to the same encyclopedia and in reference to Saint Thomas, prior to Acquin's designation as a Doctor of the Church, M. D. Chenu, O.P., comments facetiously: "Saint Thomas was a mere theologian. But, he *was* a theologian." Père Chenu reminds us of the historical influence of the theologians of Paris, Salamanca, Freiburg, and Malines. Concluding his chapter on "Theological Science," he writes: "Theology, theological science, and theologians are necessary to the Church. Her authority, far from being diminished by their specialized activities, finds therein a source of nourishment—a green pasture. *Fides quaerens intellectum*. To pursue this quest, to slake this thirst in the realms of

<sup>5</sup> *S.T.*, II-II, 72, 1.

<sup>6</sup> *AAS*, XII (1879) 97 et seqq.

<sup>7</sup> *Do Dogmas Change?*, 62.

reason is, to win for the faithful an understanding which will enable them to walk, not empty-headed, in the paths of full obedience to the Word of God and to His Church."<sup>8</sup>

It is normal to associate the theologians, also with the ordinary magisterium of the *Ecclesia Docens*—the magisterium that functions always and everywhere. In these words or in words to this effect, approved theology manuals formulate propositions such as the following: "*Sub nomine ordinarii et universalis magisterii includuntur: praedicatio, moraliter unanimes, episcoporum; consensus, moraliter unanimes, Patrum aut theologorum.*"<sup>9</sup> Another related and typical quotation: "The unanimous and constant agreement of theologians on doctrine as revealed is a sure criterion of divine tradition."<sup>10</sup> As for an accurate understanding of any proposition such as the two just quoted, we theologians realise what is implied by the usual, necessary suffix: *positis ponendis* or, if you prefer, *suppositis supponendis*.

Among other manual authors who give us a balanced development, as to the contribution to the *Ecclesia Docens* on the part of theology and theologians, we mention as typical: Schultes, O.P., the Spanish Jesuits; Xiberta, O.Carm.; and Roschini, O.S.M.

In His *Tuas Libenter* of ninety-nine years ago, addressed to the Archbishop of Munich, Pius IX, in separate paragraphs, emphasized the submission required from the *Ecclesia Credens*, both in matters of faith and in matters of theological truth. In both matters, the Vicar of Christ indicated as criteria, both the solemn and the ordinary magisteriums; and, in connection with the latter, He included as normative, the consensus of theologians.<sup>11</sup>

It seems reasonable, then, to conclude that, the successors to the Fathers of the Church, the theologians, are fit instruments, are fit instrumental causes in the *Ecclesia Docens*, divinely attuned by the directive influence of the infallible magisterium and, ultimately, by the Holy Spirit of Truth.

<sup>8</sup> *Is Theology a Science?*, 97-99.

<sup>9</sup> Tanquerey (ed. xxiii) Vol. II, 115.

<sup>10</sup> Van Noort (English translation) Vol. III, 177.

<sup>11</sup> *DB* 1679.

Finally: A balanced relation of the theologians to the *Ecclesia Sanctificans*.

Who knows? Perhaps by the time you and I have attained a relative antiquity, today's keynote theme may have been so hammered out upon the anvil of sound theological discussion, as to be considered *defnibilis*. Be that as it may be, it is in order to add a few words apropos of the theologian's realization of perspective. The *Ecclesia Docens* is related, as means to end, to the *Ecclesia Sanctificans*. So, too, the work and the accomplishments of the theologians. No one is more alertly aware than the theologian himself, as to the long range objective of his apostolate, or as to his constant need for supernatural help. Without help of that caliber, he would not be divinely attuned, as an instrumental cause he would be useless.

The theologian is less concerned about *IQ*, than about a normal telepathy between his own spirit and the Holy Spirit, upon the development of the graces of a lifetime—the graces of Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Orders. In harmony with the successors to the Apostles, the theological auxiliaries of the *Ecclesia Docens* are intent upon the more influential presentation of the Word of God, the more devout celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the more fruitful reception of the sacraments. That unearthly objective, and theology as a means thereunto, are the reasons for existence of The Catholic Theological Society of America.

ALOYSIUS McDONOUGH, C.P.  
*Passionist Monastery*  
*Jamaica, New York*