

APPENDIX II A PERSONAL MEMOIR: PART TWO

INTRODUCTORY NOTE: If any one person can be considered the Founder of the Catholic Theological Society of America it is Father Eugene M. Burke, C.S.P. Father Burke died in Los Angeles on January 29, 1984.

Always a dynamic teacher, Father Burke's lectures in dogmatic theology consistently featured historical elements. All his life he continued to be fascinated by the significance of historical studies for theological method. In 1977, shortly after his retirement from teaching, Father Burke attended the CTSA convention which was held that year in Toronto. So struck was he by the realization that American theology — and his own — had finally come of age, he determined to write for the record a history of the foundations of the Society as well as the story of his own personal theological journey.

The first part of this memoir, tracing the history of the earliest years of the Society, was published in Volume 35 (1980) of the CTSA Proceedings. It is unfortunate that the publication of the second half of this memoir has had to wait until after the author's death. It is presented here to honor the memory of a man who loved the Society and served it well. — L.S.

Since this is a memoir I think it might add color to the history by my commenting on two presentations I made to the Society — the debate on the thesis method with John Courtney Murray and my paper on Scripture and Theology.

The Thesis Form as Instrument of Theological Instruction. This debate took place in Cleveland in 1956 and the papers appear in Volume 2 of the CTSA Proceedings. I would like at this point, by offering a personal critique of this debate, to give some insight into a particular stage of American theology (at least as reflected in my experience). Also this may offer guidelines to help avoid pitfalls in the future. The debate had its origin in the then widespread and somewhat heated discussion about the form and content of the college religion course. After World War II Walter Farrell had begun to publish his popular *Companion to the Summa*. John Murray had written articles concerning the finality of a lay theology in *Theological Studies* emphasizing a biblical and historical approach. John Fernan, S.J. had appropriated Murray's approach into what was called the Le Moyne (College) plan in a series of four college religion texts. I had become involved in the discussion because in 1945 I had taught a summer course called "Theology For the Laity" at Catholic University and wrote a description of the experience for the *American Ecclesiastical Review*. Since many of the members of the Society taught college religion an appropriate methodology was rightly seen as an immediate concern.

Re-reading my own presentation after so many years I would judge that, at the time, I made an effective case for the thesis method or my approach to it, which Murray described as very "sophisticated." However, I now see its very numerous limitations. Let me elaborate on these limitations a bit because they were quite common to many of us at that point. First, I see that Murray's statement of the question hits at the central issue of the relation between the order of presentation and the nature of theology. My presentation appears to be aware of this but neither as sharply or precisely as Murray's. This is shown, I think, by the fact I did not base my argument on pedagogical exigencies, though it is clear that they are part of the ambience of the argument. In response to a question from the floor about putting the thesis at the end, I think I said I saw no necessary reason against it, but for myself I would rather not. This was surely a pedagogical rather than a theological judgement.

Another issue raised by Murray was the matter of giving the student some sense of doctrinal development. Now while I was fairly sure I was doing that in all my courses, using Newman's theory, I did not touch on it in my presentation and I am not sure why not. It could very well be that the omission was deliberate because as yet I had no satisfactory theory of doctrinal development, a problem that haunted me until the last few years when I worked out one that I am now comfortable with.

A very serious limitation in my presentation was my unquestioning acceptance of the idea of propositional revelation, with faith as simply the assent to these propositions. Apparently I was only making a formal distinction between revelation and dogmatic propositions. Concepts such as person, nature, subsistence, seemed to me to be given and immutable. The historical relativity integral to every human statement simply did not occur to me. So soon after *Huamani generis* perhaps such an idea was unthinkable.

Another criticism could be made of my assumption that the interventions of Pius IX culminated a long development in the theology of the magisterium. I am sure that many would still so argue. I have since come to feel that this understanding of magisterium was an innovation that down-played the teaching mission of the Church as a whole and made everybody but the hierarchy the *ecclesia discens*. One might have justified it at that time on pragmatic grounds. But today it appears to me that a real part of the crisis in the Church is due to the implications of this concept of magisterium for the office of the theologian, whose function is simply to exegete and substantiate magisterial documents. Implicit in this approach was the notion that the local ordinary was the only official teacher in his diocese. It is this confusion of canonical jurisdiction with the educative process (and it still exists) that makes theology a kind of *ex opere operato* ministry. Certainly one of the concerns of the Society should be to address itself to the role of "the people of God" in discerning meaning with "its infallible instinct." Also needed is a scholarly assessment and exposition of the charismatic (in Pauline terms) ministry of theologians in the magisterial office of the Church.

Another presupposition in my paper was the matter of theological conclusions. Underlying this presupposition in part was the "one philosophy, one theology" position. In this view, certain philosophical truths had been guaranteed either by the magisterium or theological consensus (*philosophia perennis*) so the conclusions drawn through them (if logically correct) were certain. Akin to this were those propositions noted erroneous by the Church, with the consequence that the opposite was permanently certain and thus could be defined as a dogma of faith. Finally there was the uncritical acceptance of the practice in theology manuals to affix the note *certum est* to doctrinal statements in papal encyclicals. As a result we had a large corpus of certitudes by the time one read through Denzinger.

The Use of the Sacred Scripture as a Locus Theologicus. This paper was delivered in Buffalo in 1959 and appeared in Volume 14 of the CTSA *Proceedings*. The background of this paper was the extensive, heated and bitter discussions in seminaries and in regional meetings over the role of contemporary exegesis in theology. It had come to a head with a paper on biblical theology by R. MacKenzie, S.J. in 1955. I had played an antagonist role in a number of the discussions even though I am not much of a scripture scholar. This is, perhaps, best illustrated by the fact that I was still using an outdated *Theologia Biblica* in the 1950's as part of my lecture on positive theology. Yet it must have been four years before I became aware that men like Amos and Hosea and Isaias were not all committed Thomists. I suppose that my resistance was due in part to the kind of *obiter dicta* of a number of the younger scripture men which I found irritating and in retrospect probably threatening. The casual dismissal of doctrinal positions that I had taught for years on the basis of some philological or Ugaritic or Sanskrit piece of lore (or so I saw it), or the kind of gleeful demythologizing by the way of shock tactics, or their attitude about the relation between revelation and dogmatic formulae, all seemed to me a kind of crypto-modernism or crypto-liberal Protestantism. I expressed it more felicitously in my paper: "The first of these problematics for the theologian is the feeling that the exegete is so captive to or captivated by the exigencies of philology, literary criticism, history and archaeology that he tends to look on the theological and religious implication of his subject as either unimportant or someone else's concern" (p.55).

In any case when the invitation was extended to me to do the paper I rejoiced. I felt that it was about time that some one put these people in their place. But to do so I felt that in fairness I would have to examine in depth the case for the "new Scripture." With the help of men like Pat Skeehan — a friend since my seminary days and a wise man whom I trusted — I set out to read as far as possible all the relevant periodical literature from 1955 on. (I cannot remember why I set that year.) For the first time I read seriously *Divino Afflante Spiritu* and the commentaries on it. By reason or my periodical reading I began to study the actual commentaries of men like Lagrange, Spicq, Coppens and Levie.

By the time I had been reading for three months my whole attitude toward the relation of Scripture and theology began to change. The result was what Gus Weigel later called my "conversion," and I guess I must agree.

I had come to realize personally what Murray had said in our debate that "the Christian Religion is first of all a sacred history." I had also been made aware of the centrality of a theological anthropology suited to our contemporary world and to the world of the Bible. Present to me now was the consciousness of the dynamic existential aspect of theologizing. Finally I had been forced to study Lonergan's *Insight* and had come to affirm with a real assent that methodology presupposes an epistemology.

One important area in which I found myself forced to reverse a long held position was the relation of Scripture and Tradition to revelation. For many years I had received as a given that together they constituted the twofold source of revelation. While this position did raise ecumenical questions (I had by now become involved in this), still it helped to solve other problems with regard to the theology of the sacraments and the Assumption of Mary. On examining it particularly in the light of J.R. Geiselmann it became manifest to me that I had accepted the polemical position of the Counter Reformation (e.g. Bellarmine) because neither they nor I had a satisfactory or viable theory of doctrinal development. My change of position as presented in the paper is fairly cumbersome as I attempt to explain why I felt it necessary to change. Probably I was still working to convince myself, I am not sure. However it should be noted that at the end of the paragraph (p. 68) I did make an effort to protect myself on the Mariological issue.

I should note in passing that my troubles with Cardinal McIntyre began over Scripture and Tradition. He had asked me to comment on the preparatory schema on revelation sent out before the Council. It was entitled *De Duplici Fonte Revelationis: Scriptura et Traditio*. As a new convert I took a strong stand against that thesis and he told me it was sure to be made a dogma. I said the Holy Spirit would never allow it, etc. We parted in an atmosphere of what I might call "mutual aghastness," he aghast at my position I aghast at his reaction.

One point in the CTSA paper that I stressed a great deal was once again an uncritically accepted but very weighty theological tradition from St. Thomas down to Marin-Sola. This tradition would maintain that the apostles by a special apostolic *lumen* had had an explicit knowledge of the whole content of revelation. Thus, only at the eschaton would the Church's understanding of revelation be equivalent to that of the apostles. I guess that even in the course of changing my mind I wanted to be sure that someone knew the whole thing. All this did was to resolve my problem without providing an answer. You would think that any concentrated study of the New Testament would have left me somewhat wary of this idea. As Ed Benard said about it, "I wonder what poor old Peter would have answered if you asked him about the *homousion* or transubstantiation?"

It was in this paper that for the first time I began to feel that I was coming to grips with an overarching problem of mine — the development of doctrine. To help me I had a paper that had been delivered by Ed Benard a couple of months before at the college teachers' meeting: "The Development of Doctrine: A Basic Framework" (*SCCTSD Proceedings* 5 [1959]). He had retained the implicit-explicit approach but rejected the confusing and ambiguous virtually implicit. Instead Benard had centered on the formally explicit and all the implications that God willed to convey through the formally explicit. So conceived, it moved beyond the strictly dialectical and opened the way for these implications to be discerned through "the investigations of exegesis, history and speculation." For me this was the beginning of a breakthrough, though I still had to realize the process of interaction (or is it "interfacing" these days) between the *Word* and the relativities of history.

Although I had not looked for at least a decade at my apologia for speculative theology, it seems to me now to have aged fairly well. Perhaps today it might be more effectively presented under the rubric of systematic theology, thus indicating the whole theological process. Particularly interesting to me is the section on the role of faith in theology (pp. 89-92) and especially the footnote on page 90. I do not remember how clearly I saw it then, but it certainly indicates to me the beginning of a change from a propositional view of faith to a personal and existential understanding of faith — "by grace seeing, as it were, from within." To this must be added the point derived from my study of Bultmann: "There is of necessity an anthropology which the Word of God presupposes and in that sense subordinates itself to. It is precisely that anthropology that the exegete must recognize, analyze and reflect on if he would exegete the divine message — he must think philosophically."

The last point made in the paper marks the beginning for me of a turning away from the one only philosophy-theology (Thomism as I understood it) to a much broader horizon for the *philosophia perennis*. Here is what I wrote:

"... I am not unaware that this speculative theology can in some hands lose its relevance to these critical problems. I am also conscious that it can be transmitted and applied as though it were a closed system calling for no personal reflection or assimilation. These may be verified in individual cases, but what I hope to make clear is the need for a continuing and vital effort, that vital effort resting on the Christian interpretation of the world and the effort to understand man, his situation and the world in which he lives in the light of Christianity. It maintains that it is an abiding metaphysical pattern in the developing universe — a pattern which is capable of being understood and stated. It does not follow that any given man has an adequate understanding, nor that any man is released from the continuing development of insight. Nor does it exclude the possibility of fresh insight into truth by non-Catholic thinkers. It does claim that these insights can be organically assimilated by a vital speculative theology" (p. 95-96).

Today I would put it thus: "There is a rich source to be mined in the perceptively articulated insights into truth (or perhaps into reality?) by non-Catholic thinkers."

In conclusion I should like to add a couple of *obiter dicta* of my own.

Since I have been regularly referring to my problem with doctrinal development I should like to introduce here a few personal animadversions on the topic. As a long time member of the Committee on Current Problems I used to bring this up regularly. After my own paper in 1949 I was able to persuade the committee to make it a topic for the next convention in Washington, John Galvin, S.S. presented it in the form of a short survey and I was quite disappointed. Another paper was presented at Philadelphia in 1957 by Cyril Vollert S.J. It was a very serious effort and clarified for me several points, but I remained unsatisfied, probably because I wasn't sure myself what I wanted. I have not read it in many years but my memory is that it was still enclosed in the dialectical approach.

Part of this dissatisfaction came from my own effort to deal with it in terms of the doctrine of the Assumption about 1948 or 1949 in the *AER*. The first of these articles was entitled "A Framework for Doctrinal Development" which emphasized the role of the magisterium. I undertook a second article to argue from "tradition," as I understood it, with considerable attention being given to the fourth glorious mystery of the rosary. I had planned four articles, the next to be on the idea of theological consensus, but I stopped after the second and apparently decided to rely on *fides sola* if the doctrine were defined.

My next effort came in 1959 in the paper on Scripture and theology described above. Then in 1966 I wrote a paper for the Presbyterian-Reformed/Roman Catholic Consultation, printed in a volume called *Reconsiderations* by the U.S.C.C. By this time I had really shaken off the dialectical approach and had begun to come to grips with historicity if not totally so. Further, I had come to appreciate the full significance for doctrinal development of Newman's *Grammar of Assent* and Lonergan's *Insight*. Out of this I began to see the role of engraced insight or intuition into the apostolic experience as transmitted by and through the Church (K. Rahner) through the Holy Spirit. The weakness in the paper was pointed out to me by my Presbyterian colleague James Nichols. He showed that I presumed that every development was perfective and represented progress in the understanding of revelation and that this was not necessarily or always the case.

It was some time before I faced up to this criticism and then it came to me in reading a critique of Teilhard de Chardin. The author of the critique, whoever it was, maintained that in dealing with human evolution you would not confine yourself simply to a biological model. Rather the model must take into full account human historicity and freedom. It gradually dawned on me that if you applied this to doctrinal development then you could account for possibilities of retrogression, deviation, false emphasis, intransigence, obscurantism and error. Hence the force of the footnote to *Lumen gentium* — indefectibility means only that the Church will never wholly fall away from the gospel.

I think the time is ripe for a full scale discussion of this whole topic at a convention of the Society. The other area where the Society has

stepped very cautiously and gingerly is ecumenical theology. I offer this not as a criticism of the period before Vatican II since the climate at that time makes the neglect quite understandable. Neither is it a criticism of the years immediately after the Council. Some kind of ground breaking and foundation laying had to be done by the various ecumenical consultations. My complaint is that, although a number of the members of the Society are on these consultations, the Society itself has not taken up the crucial ecumenical questions that have been raised to study them in depth. For example, apostolic succession has been a basic issue all along, touching the structure of Church unity and its sacramental life. There is an extensive but scattered body of material on apostolic succession as it involves eucharistic ministry, ecclesiology and the like. A model might well be the symposium held in Philadelphia on the eucharist, published in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* and later in book form by the Paulist Press.

As long as I am exercising the privileges of an old man passing out advice, I will conclude with a suggestion that has struck me as I was preparing and writing this memoir. Might it not be a good idea to appoint a committee to select several seminal papers drawn from the volumes of the *Proceedings*? They would have in view to show both the development of American Catholic theology and the contribution of the Society to that development.

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