

THE FUNCTION OF THEOLOGY IN THE UNIVERSITY

Our subject this evening is very broad. Perhaps its breadth is more understandable if we consider the position of this lecture as introductory to those which are to follow. Unless the matter under consideration this evening is clearly established, there would be no point in pursuing further the more specific theological subjects that have been projected in this series.

From the onset, we are faced with issues that cannot be avoided. It might be easier to avoid them, but it would not be intellectually honest. The first issue is a challenge from the world in which we live, a world which might best be characterized by the classic phrase of the Italian novelist, Manzoni, 'guazzabuglio del cuore umano' --the utter confusion in the heart of man. Applied to the matter at hand, we might be challenged thus by the modern university man: "Does not your discussion of the function of theology in the University, side step a more basic question that you are assuming: namely, that theology has any place at all in a university?"

I do not think that we answer this challenge satisfactorily by retorting: "We are talking about a Catholic University." Our thesis will of course have more validity for a Catholic University, but God is not merely known by faith alone, and universities are by their very nature committed to the transmission of what is knowable and all that is known. Granted that we know more of God by theology, the science of faith, than by reason alone, nonetheless we cannot hide behind this knowledge of faith and commit other seats of learning to the exterior darkness of a knowledge that is limited to the less important of the possible objects of man's intelligence. We can admit the fact of secularism in universities

at large, but God help us if we become so narrow or so complacent as to condone it in theory.

At the moment, we must approach this challenge by endeavoring to understand it historically. Only then may we be in a position to do something about it actually. Confronted by this very real challenge, "Does theology have any place in a university since, in effect, it doesn't have any place today?" I am reminded of Our Lord's answer to the factual difficulty of the bill of divorce granted by Moses and much abused in the society of His day. Christ answered: "From the beginning it was not so." (Matt. 19:8)

The historical evolution of universities and university life has an important bearing on this matter. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when the great universities were developing around the scholars at Bologna, Chartres, Paris, Louvain, Canterbury and Oxford, theology was very much a part of university learning. In fact, many have commented that it was too much at the center of things, so much so, that the normal development of the arts and sciences were inhibited somewhat until the advent of the Renaissance and that revival of the Latin and Greek classics which is called humanism. This much we can say, that the highest peak of theology ever known was developed at the Universities under such men as St. Albert the Great, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure and a host of like company. Nor were the arts or sciences completely forgotten in an age which produced the poetry of Dante and Chaucer, the painting of Giotto, and the magnificent cathedrals that thrilled the people for centuries until an age of science found means to reduce them to rubble.

But the pendulum of history will swing, and it did, bringing a new artistic emphasis with the Renaissance, a return to the ancient

eloquence of Greece and Rome. When theology returned, it was not so much the pure study of Divine Wisdom, as the battle axe of orthodoxy, the weapon of the Church in a state of seige, after the Reformation. Piety which should be the supernatural result of Divine Wisdom became more an end in itself. This affected the new sectarian Protestant universities as well as the Catholic. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought another factor of disintegration: the advent of the scientific age. Again, note well that there is nothing in the nature of science, just as there is nothing in the nature of theology or classical studies, which should make science a cause of disintegration. But this historical fact is clearly present, that the new emphasis on the quadrivial study of science, introduced by such men as Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Descarte, Newton, and forwarded in a strictly positivistic way by Compte and his followers, eventually left the university world with a neatly segmented and completely unrelated body of knowledge to be transmitted to posterity.

The net result is that today we have the scientist, the humanist and the theologian, none of them, by and large, speaking the same language or speaking to each other. And if now, science and the scientific method is actually in the ascendancy, its emblem may well be the famous statue, winged victory, of the Louvre, magnificent in body, but with no head, and therefore with no direction, neither from temporal wisdom of humanism, nor from the eternal wisdom of theology. And if a headless winged victory be its emblem, ^{the} ^{offspring of science} the holocaust of Hiroshima may well be a presage of its future, for at Hiroshima the greatest discovery of modern science was unveiled amid the greatest mass carnage of human life known to man. As Oppenheimer has remarked: "The scientist has now known sin." Should we not rather say, he has known only science because that is all the university taught him to know, and in this respect, it is the university

not the scientist, who has committed the sin.

Obviously, we cannot continue in this wise and survive. It is not a question of scrapping science, or of giving more mediocre lip service to the ancient arts, or of imagining that if we read a few pages of St. Thomas' Summa Theologica all will be well.

To return to the point at issue: we began by asking if theology had any place, much less a function, in the university. We have seen that it used to have a place, but that things have changed. We need not assume, therefore, that the new development of the arts and sciences since the Middle Ages is bad, nor need we prattle that we should return to the Middle Ages. We are living in the world as it is, and God knows it because He put us here, today, and He certainly put us here to do something intelligent, today. Christopher Dawson says that we would be a lot happier if we did not have to look to the roots of our present culture, because if it were a living and healthy culture we could assume that the roots were there. (Enquires into Religion and Culture, Introd.) But if we must look at the roots because we suspect that the whole tree is tottering, then, let us look well. We might secure the roots, but we gain nothing by allowing the tree to fall, or by denying that it is really tottering.

I have assumed that we might take a short cut to the answer by phrasing it in terms of theology, instead of the arts and sciences, because theology is by its nature a glance from the top down. This is the approach used by Cardinal Newman in his famous "Idea of a University." The first three discourses that follow his introduction are on the nature of theology and the interrelations of theology to the other branches of knowledge in a university. Note that Newman was faced

with the same historical background that faces us today. His stand was not harried by the urgency of the atomic age which is now upon us, but he was even then answering the basic question we have set ourselves to answer: Does theology have any place in a University? Even when as a matter of fact it does not have any place in most universities today?

We will do well to follow Newman's thinking in this matter. And because he has expressed his thought so eloquently, I should like to summarize his thought as much as possible in his own words.

Newman first establishes that theology does have a real and important place in a university.

I say then, that if a University be, from the nature of the case, a place of instruction, where universal knowledge is professed, and if in a certain University, so called, the subject of Religion is excluded, one of two conclusions is inevitable, --either, on the one hand, that the province of Religion is very barren of real knowledge or, on the other hand, that in such University one special and important branch of knowledge is omitted. I say, the advocate of such an institution must say this, or he must say that; he must own, either that little or nothing is known about the Supreme Being, or that his seat of learning calls itself what it is not. This is the thesis which I lay down, and on which I shall insist as the subject of this Discourse. (Idea of a University, p.21)

Later on in the same Discourse, he returns to his thesis with even more insistency:

If, then, in an Institution which professes all knowledge, nothing is professed, nothing is taught about the Supreme Being, it is fair to infer that every individual in the number of those who advocate that Institution, supposing him consistent, distinctly holds that nothing is known for certain about the Supreme Being; nothing such, as to have any claim to be regarded as a material addition to the stock of general knowledge existing in the world. If on the other hand it turns out that something considerable is known about the Supreme Being, whether from Reason or Revelation, then the Institution in question professes every science, and yet leaves out the foremost

of them. In a word, strong as may appear the assertion, I do not see how I can avoid making it, and bear with me Gentlemen, while I do so, viz., such an Institution cannot be what it professes, if there be a God. I do not wish to declaim; but, by the very force of the terms, it is very plain, that a Divine Being, and a University so circumstanced cannot co-exist. (Ibid., pp.24-25)

Newman's second step is to consider the bearing of Theology on other branches of knowledge. His basic thesis here, which has even greater bearing on the confusion which reigns in our universities today, is that knowledge or truth is one and organic. To neglect one branch of truth, especially the most important branch, is to truncate the whole body of knowledge. Again in Newman's words:

Truth is the object of Knowledge of whatever kind, and when we inquire what is meant by Truth, I suppose it is right to answer that Truth means facts and their relations,...All that exists, as contemplated by the human mind, forms one large system or complex fact, and this of course resolves itself into an indefinite number of particular facts, which, as being portions of a whole, have countless relations of every kind, one towards another. Knowledge is the apprehension of these facts, whether in themselves, or in their mutual positions and bearings. (Ibid., p.45)

He then brings theology into this complete and organic picture of truth:

I lay it down that all knowledge forms one whole, because its subject-matter is one; for the universe in its length and breadth is so intimately knit together, that we cannot separate off portion from portion, and operation from operation, except by a mental abstraction; and then again, as to its Creator, though He of course in His own Being is infinitely separate from it, and Theology has its departments towards which human knowledge has no relations, yet He has so implicated Himself with it, His providence over it, His impressions upon it, and His influences through it, that we cannot truly or fully contemplate it without in some main aspects contemplating Him. (pp.50-51)

I have said nothing as yet as to the pre-eminent dignity of Religious Truth; I only say, if there be Religious Truth at all, we cannot shut our eyes to it without prejudice to truth of every kind, physical, metaphysical, historical and moral; for it bears upon all truth. (Ibid., p.52)

rephrased

All this leads Newman to profess what he means by theology. Everyone should read section seven of this third discourse to view the full expanse of theological wisdom, even on its very lowest level as known by reason alone. Newman's words are too lengthy to cite here, and an equally eloquent passage on theology as known by faith can be found in the concluding chapter of the great German Theologian Sheeben's Mysteries of Christianity. Suffice it to say for the logic of our argument, that theology comprises the truths we know about God put into system. (p.61) Newman's conclusion to his eulogy on theological wisdom is the important sequel we must read in his own words:

End

If this be the sketch, accurate in substance and as far as it goes, of the doctrines proper to Theology, and especially of the doctrine of a particular Providence, which is the portion of it most on a level with human sciences, I cannot understand at all, supposing it to be true, how it can fail, considered as knowledge, to exert a powerful influence on philosophy, literature, and every intellectual creation or discovery whatever. I cannot understand how it is possible, as the phrase goes, to blink the question of its truth or falsehood. It meets us with a profession and a proffer of the highest truths of which the human mind is capable; it embraces a range of subjects most diversified and distant from each other. What science will not find one part or other of its province traversed by its path? What results of philosophic speculation are unquestionable, if they have been gained without inquiry as to what Theology had to say to them? Does it cast no light upon history? has it no influence upon the principles of ethics? is it without any sort of bearing on physics, metaphysics, and political science? Can we drop it out of the circle of knowledge, without allowing, either that that circle is thereby mutilated, or on the other hand, that theology is really no science? And this dilemma is the more inevitable, because Theology is so precise and consistent in its intellectual structure. (Ibid, pp. 66-67)

The conclusion of this discourse is as masterful as what has preceded it. Once more, Newman speaks for himself:

It will not take many words to sum up what I have been urging. I say then, if the teaching in a University, so hang together, that none can be neglected without prejudice to the rest, and if Theology be a branch of knowledge, of wide reception, of philosophical structure, of unutterable importance, and of supreme influence, to what conclusion are we brought from these two premisses but this? that to withdraw Theology from the public schools is to impair the completeness and to invalidate the trustworthiness of all that is actually taught in them....In a word, Religious Truth is not only a portion, but a condition of general knowledge. To blot it out is nothing short, if I may so speak, of unravelling the web of University Teaching. It is, according to the Greek proverb, to take the Spring from out of the year; it is to imitate the preposterous proceeding of those tragedians who represented a drama with the omission of its principal part." (Ibid, pp.69-70)

In the last of his discourses on this subject, Newman speaks of the bearing of the other branches of knowledge upon Theology. He summarizes his position by saying that "The human mind cannot keep from speculating and systematizing; and if Theology is not allowed to occupy its own territory, adjacent science, nay, sciences that are quite foreign to Theology, will take possession of it. And this occupation is proved to be a usurpation, by this circumstance that these foreign sciences will assume certain principles as true, and act upon them, which they neither have the authority to lay down themselves, nor appeal to any other higher science to lay down for them." (Ibid., pp.96-7) He cites some obvious examples like Physiology denying moral evil or human responsibility; Geology denying Moses; or Logic denying the Holy Trinity.

We believe that Cardinal Newman, in these first hundred pages of his Idea of a University has established the case for theology quite cogently. The whole matter might be summarized in three points: 1) If a university professes to teach all knowledge and excludes theology it is untrue to its profession. 2) Given the connection and the bearing of all sciences upon each other, and the important influence of theology as completing, integrating and correcting them on higher principles of knowledge, to omit the science of theology would be to compromise the teaching of other branches of knowledge. and finally, 3) if Theology is not taught, it will not only be neglected, but its proper function will be usurped by other branches of knowledge which cannot properly function in its field because they lack the theological sources of knowledge and its over-all perspective.

One of Newman's anglican associates, Dr. Pusey, has left us a prophetic version of what our Universities would be without God, what they are today, without theology. Secularism may be defended by some as neutrality. In effect, Pusey indicates that it will result in the official sanction of godlessness. It would have been well for the Supreme Court Justices to read Pusey's words of ninety years ago before rendering their decision in the McCullum case:

All things must speak of God, refer to God, or they are atheistic. History, without God, is a chaos without design or end or aim. Political Economy, without God, would be a selfish teaching about the acquisition of wealth, making the larger portion of mankind animate machines for its production; Physics, without God, would be but a dull inquiry into certain meaningless phenomena; Ethics, without God, would be a varying rule without principle, or substance, or centre, or ruling hand; Metaphysics, without God, would make man his own temporary God, to be resolved, after his brief hour here, into the nothingness out of which he proceeded. All sciences....will tend to exclude the thought of God if they are not cultivated with reference to Him. History will become an account of man's passions and brute strength instead of the ordering of God's providence for creatures' good; Physics will materialize man, and

Metaphysics, God. (Collegiate and Professional Teaching and Discipline, p.25.)

While we admire the strong language of Newman and Pusey, and recognize the justness of their claim for theology as an integral part of university training, we must be existentialist enough to recognize the present situation of theology in our universities at large. We have already seen the historical retrogression of theology from a position of monopoly (certainly not an ideal situation) to a condition of primacy, then equality and now polite toleration or legislated disregard for the most part. There is rather open recognition of this fact. The recent Harvard Report: General Education in a Free Society recognizes the fact that a century ago the unifying purpose and idea of education was to train Christian citizens; but states that today "This solution is out of the question in publicly supported colleges and is practically, if not legally, impossible in most others.... Whatever one's views, religion is not now for most colleges a practicable source of intellectual unity." (p.39)

However general this pessimistic view of the matter may be, an increasing number of educational critics are viewing this lack of theology with some alarm. One of the most recent of these non-catholic critics, Sir Walter Moberly, has pin-pointed the result of such education without theology in his book: The Crisis in the University. He writes:

Our predicament then is this. Most students go through our universities without ever having been forced to exercise their minds on the issues which are really momentous. Under the guise of academic neutrality they are subtly conditioned to unthinking acquiescence in the social and political status quo and in a secularism on which they have never seriously reflected. Owing to the prevailing fragmentation of studies, they are not challenged to decide responsibly on a life-purpose or equipped to make such a decision wisely. They are not incited to disentangle and examine critically the assumptions and emotional attitudes underlying the

particular studies they pursue, the profession for which they are preparing, the ethical judgements they are accustomed to make and the political or religious convictions they hold. Fundamentally they are uneducated. (p.70)

Message

As mentioned previously, we cannot stop at this juncture, and sigh for the Middle Ages. Nor need we throw up our hands because the situation is next to hopeless in the state universities. Nor again, do we become complacent at this point and emote: "Well, at least we have the answer to the situation in our own Catholic Universities." True we do have the answer, at least some men do, insofar as theory is concerned. But it is nothing short of wishful thinking or vincible ignorance to claim that we are anywhere near accomplishing the true function of theology in most of our own universities. I think that the anglican critic Moberly quoted above, went to the heart of the problem when he stated: "Today many university teachers and administrators are Christians. But few, if any, of us are Christian teachers or Christian administrators. That is, we have failed so far to bring any distinctive Christian insight to the problems of university and governance with which, in our professional capacity, we are constantly concerned." (p.26) I would like to go a step further and state that we will never begin to do so until we gain a deeper insight into the fullness of Christian wisdom that theology offers, and then bring this wisdom to bear upon the arts and sciences we teach. The magnitude and deepening dilemma of the University problem generally is even more reason for us to use our wider resources to lead the way to a solution open to us and closed to many others.

Jacques Maritain was indicating just this when speaking on the Humanities and Liberal Education during the Terry Lectures at Yale University seven years ago. After extolling the rational wisdom of philosophy, he adds this note which all of us should take to heart:

Now, those who share in the Christian creed know another rational wisdom, which is rooted in faith, not reason alone, is superior to the merely human wisdom of metaphysics. As a matter of fact, theological problems and controversies have permeated the whole development of Western culture and civilization, and are still at work in its depths, in such a way that the one who would ignore them would be fundamentally unable to grasp his own time and the meaning of its internal conflicts.... Neither Dante nor Cervantes nor Rabelais nor Shakespeare nor John Donne nor William Blake, nor even Oscar Wilde or D. H. Lawrence, nor Giotto nor Michelangelo nor El Greco nor Zurbaran, nor Pascal nor Rousseau, nor Madison nor Jefferson nor Edgar Allan Poe nor Baudelaire nor Goethe nor Nietzsche nor even Karl Marx, nor Tolstoy nor Dostoevski is actually understandable without a serious theological background.... Nobody can do without theology, at least a concealed and unconscious theology, and the best way of avoiding the inconveniences of an insinuated theology is to deal with theology that is consciously aware of itself. And liberal education cannot complete its task without the knowledge of the specific realm and concerns of theological wisdom. (Education at the Crossroads, pp. 73-74)

All this seems to point in one direction, and I think it is in the direction of the faculty. In the early days of education, where there was a learned man, and those who would learn from him, there was a university. Today we have organized universities to the hilt, but this does not involve a short cut to learning. The Holy Father once said to a group of Catholics, you do not belong to the Church, you are the Church. We can in a very similar sense say to the members of the faculty: you are the university. [If there is a great problem of integration and revivification of university learning today, where can it be initiated if not in the mind and heart of the teacher? I hope we have established the fact that theology is at the heart of this process of integration and revivification, but to accomplish the reality of a full-blown Christian wisdom, the fullness of theology, philosophy, arts and sciences, one truth with many facets, it must exist primarily in the minds of the professors. Only then can Christian wisdom be communicated to the students.]

Etienne Gilson has put the case boldly when he declared in his Christianity and Philosophy: "It is possible to be a savant, a philosopher, and an artist without having studied theology, but it is impossible without it to become a Christian savant, philosopher, or artist. Without theology, we can indeed be, on the one hand Christians, and on the other hand savants, philosophers or artists, but never without theology will our Christianity descend into our science, into our philosophy, into our art, to reform them from within and to vivify them. For that, the best will in the world would not suffice. It is necessary to know how to do it, in order to be able to do it, and like the rest it cannot be known without being learned." (p1120-121)

Father Leo R. Ward reaches the same conclusion from a different point of vantage in his provocative new book: Blueprint for a Catholic University. Reasoning from the very nature of the university, he holds that it is primarily the vitalizing and integrating force of theology that establishes a university as Catholic. This alone can bring the mind into form as Catholic. How will it be accomplished in reality? Not by having as professors or consequently training scientists, or artists or philosophers who happen also to be Catholics, but by the living forceful wisdom of Catholic scientists, Catholic artists and Catholic philosophers communicated from teachers to students. He wants no mediocre science or art or philosophy, for in the words of Gilson again, 'piety does not dispense with technique'. What Father Ward vehemently pleads for is the fullness of wisdom, the 'marriage of faith and supreme intellectualism', the unification in the educator of all those elements of truth and wisdom which have been departmentalized and separated during the past six centuries. To the very heart of the teacher-to-be he addresses these words of Gilson: "No one, nor anything, obliges the Christian to busy himself with science or art, or philosophy, for other ways of serving God are not wanting; but if that is the way of serving God that he has chosen, the end

itself, which he proposes to himself in studying theⁿ, binds him to excellence. He is bound....to become a good savant, a good philosopher, or a good artist. That is for him the only way of becoming a good servant." (Christianity and Philosophy, p.115)

This is the goal that Father Ward incessantly holds before the eyes of the university educator: Christian Wisdom, adequate knowledge, with theology at its heart. And I think his case is ever the more cogent, and superlatively urgent when he explains how we alone in Catholic Universities have the tradition, as well as the theological and rational equipment to do the work as no one else can. I feel forced here to let him speak for himself:

Adequacy of knowledge, through reason and revelation crowning science, can be found only in Catholic learning. Admirable tradition in intellectual life, based on reason and revelation and expressed above all in the interdependent sciences of philosophy and theology, such is the record. The minds of its people and of all people needing this tradition and this adequacy and completion, so that man may have the best opportunity to know himself, his world and his God, such is the urgent situation. An admirable tradition, and adequacy of knowledge, and persons and society suffering; these in short are the terms to be considered when we think of the duty to promote learning. We would therefore be unforgivable if this learning were to grow sickly and half-hearted in our colleges, if we were for a moment anti-intellectual, more adept in the narrowly pragmatic than in our intellectual tradition, more keen for physics and foreign commerce than for theology, and more ready to try for excellence in athletics and physical culture than in history. Certain matters cannot be tolerated. For example, either a contrary or an indolent state of mind, or an intellectually apathetic attitude and a fideistic shallowness where richness and reality of knowledge ought, by nature and grace, to abound..... the colleges and universities are required to examine their own consciences. Against theory and against achievements they have to check what is done towards the making and unmaking of man....This is our magnificent work: to find out what man by nature is, and what by nature he is to be, and what by nature and grace he is and is to be, and what his arts can be, and to try to teach all this. Christian Wisdom in all its profound perspectives is something for the colleges and universities to seek and cherish.... Must we not for the common good have scholar-saints and must we not for that good have colleges and universities centers devoted simultaneously to the fullest Catholic

living and the fullest Catholic knowing? Are we not compelled by the logic of the situation to have men and women who are saints and scholars and who also know how to make their arts or sciences one vital whole with theology? Surely he who loves God could for the love of God come to love and to seek truth, and love to teach others to seek the truth through science, and would enjoy expressing truth in arts and teaching others to find it in nature and to express it in their lives and in literature and every art.... If we are to have Catholic colleges and universities we must have them. These schools must be honest, full-bodied, not places for politicians, muddlers or time-servers. They must be consecrated and seek to know as Catholic and to teach as Catholic. No substitution, no compromise." (pp.201-210)

There is much more that could be said, but this is only the beginning, not the end of a series of theological lectures. I had hoped to discuss more at length the distinction and organic relationship between theology stemming from faith and philosophy, arts, and sciences stemming from reason. This question too is at the heart of our present discussion, but it will have to wait until a future lecture. We have mentioned and quoted from many authors, not because we could not have paraphrased their words, but to give those who might be unacquainted with this field, a taste of what can be found for the inspiration of the man who consecrates his life and his talents to the apostolate of Christian Education. If we have made this much clear, that there is much to be done, a great crisis to be faced, but that we have been blessed with the elements of a great victory if we consecrate our intelligence to the teaching of Christian Wisdom, then a brighter day is indeed ahead, for ourselves, and our school, and our church and our country and our world. I would like to consecrate the efforts of all who take part in these lectures to Mary, the Seat of Wisdom, that she may make our university, dedicated to her name, a true seat of wisdom.