

The true nature of Theology, according to the mind of St. Thomas, is expressed in the following analogy: As understanding stands to wisdom, so does faith in relation to Theology. Therefore, Theology will bear the same relation towards faith which wisdom does to the habit of first principles. The analogy then: wisdom is compared to understanding as a fuller and more universal knowledge: for, in the first place, wisdom regards the first principles themselves in order to explain and defend them - wherein it agrees with the habit of first principles; and moreover, it draws conclusions from principles, wherein it departs from the role of understanding and takes on the ratio of science. Wisdom then has two distinct functions: first, that of explaining and defending principles; and secondly, that of inferring conclusions. In the exercise of the first function, wisdom attains the object which is proper to understanding, namely, principles or truths which are per se and immediately evident. In the exercise of its other function, wisdom attains the object which is proper to science, namely, truths which are known mediately or by demonstration. Therefore, the object of wisdom is broader ('amplius') than the objects both of understanding and of science taken separately. It is broader than the object of understanding because it extends to conclusions, which the habit of first principles does not touch; it is equally wider than the object of science, because it embraces principles, which science does not attain.

Although principles are attained both by understanding and by wisdom, they are not grasped by each in the same way. Understanding grasps principles by simple assent, without ~~and~~ discourse; wisdom, however, is concerned with the same principles, but in a discursive and argumentative mode.

Now then: if Theology be conceived as wisdom in relation to faith, by this very fact it must be admitted that the theological habit should not only draw conclusions from the truths of faith, but also explain and defend these very truths. From which it follows that the total or adequate material object of Theology is not truth which is only virtually revealed, but every revealed truth whatsoever, whether formally and explicitly or mediately and virtually revealed. In a word: both principles and conclusions. Therefore, the object of Theology is broader in scope than is the object of faith. Further, faith and Theology are not to be distinguished because the former regards truths formally and immediately revealed, whereas the latter treats only of those which have been virtually revealed. The true distinction between faith and Theology lies in this, that faith is concerned only with what has been immediately and explicitly revealed, and Theology is concerned with truths which have been revealed both immediately and formally as well as mediately and virtually.

It must be noted that faith and Theology do not both treat in the same manner of truths immediately revealed. Faith seizes these revealed truths by a simple assent based solely on the authority of God revealing, without any discourse; but Theology grasps these truths by means of human discourse. The formal, motivating object in the habit of faith is formal revelation; in Theology it is human discourse, under the light of Divine Revelation. According to this conception, Theology is at once an explication, a defense, and an evolution of faith itself, objectively considered.

Only he can be called a perfect theologian who possesses the habit of Theology not only in its essence but also in all of its powers. For this

reason, he and he alone is to be called a perfect theologian who is able to exercise all the functions of Theology, readily, skillfully, and with ease. Thus did Francis de Vitoria conceive of the perfect theologian: "The office and function of the theologian is so extensive that no argument, no dispute, no place seems foreign to the theological profession and institution. And perhaps this is also the reason, as Cicero says of the orator, that in every field of learning and in all the arts there are so few outstanding and eminent men to be found; for such - unless my standards are too stringent - is the great scarcity of good, solid theologians.

Kindred sentiments are found in the writings of Natalis Alexander:

"I will allow that a man is scarcely half a theologian who, although well-versed in scholastic questions, is a stranger or only a passing acquaintance in the fields of sacred Scripture, ecclesiastical History, the Councils, and the teachings of the holy Fathers."

But who is the theologian who can exercise each and every one of the functions of Theology as readily, so skillfully, and so easily? "Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of him." The great theologians themselves, almost overwhelmed by the magnitude of their science, have openly confessed their ignorance. That great restorer of Theology in Spain, Francis de Vitoria, after forty years spent in preparing lectures afterwards to be delivered in the schools, sensing that his life was drawing to a close, spoke these words to his disciples, almost groaning as he spoke: "It used to seem to me, at the beginning of my career (as a teacher), after I had completed my course as a student of Theology, that I knew a great deal; but now, to tell the truth, I see that I am still at the threshold. My age and the arduousness of the task terrify me, for I realize that in twenty or thirty years a theologian can know very little, since, in order to be, I will not

say a perfect theologian, but one who has some correct understanding of theological matters, a man must study the entire Bible and the commentaries of the Saints on it, which certainly cannot be accomplished in less than a great number of years.' Cano expressed himself similarly: "But you may ask: Is there anyone so inflated with error as to persuade himself that he knows (all) these things? In fact, I would not in the least condemn a theologian who had not mastered all of this learning; but I would reprehend one who, although he had not attained the mastery, usurped for himself the title of theologian. For that type of argument, which is aptly drawn from all possible sources, is perfect and complete and includes all factors, nor can it be devised by any save the finished theologian.'

Dominic Banez shared these same sentiments when he wrote: "Therefore, let no one - no matter with how lofty a genius he may have been endowed and allowed to partake of Divine doctrine - think that he is no longer to be counted in the ranks of little children. In truth, if he is truly wise, so much the more will he acknowledge that he is but a little babe. For when a man has finished, then he will begin. Indeed, I find this difference between the most outstanding theologians and the common men among the faithful, that the wiser a theologian is, so much the more earnestly does he acknowledge his own ignorance and infirmity, so that in his own eyes he appears to be a small child. On the other hand, those who have a lesser knowledge of Divine science, do not know how much they actually lack, so that they are ignorant of their own ignorance."

I am aware that the goal to be attained by the theologian is surpassingly exalted and sublime. Still, it is the one and only goal towards which we must all strive, unceasingly and with all our strength.

But the higher and more sublime the goal, so much the greater, more persevering, and more intense ought our labor to be, so that we might at least draw near to it. Only those courageous souls can approach this goal who have, as it were, carved on their minds and hearts these words of our Angelic Doctor: "Since man's perfection consists in union with God, man should, by all the means in his power, mount up and strive to attain Divine truths, so that his intellect may take delight in contemplation, and his reason in the investigation of the things of God, according to the prayer in Ps. 72:27: "It is good for us to adhere to my God."