

## WISDOM IN THE COLLEGES

Every man guides the steps of his life by wisdom, or a counterfeit of it. For every man must act in the light of some supreme value, some last end. (1) Seeing his days, his

1. Summa Theologica, I-II, q. 1, a. 6.

years, all his works in the light of this goal, to which all else is subordinated, is to see with the eyes of some kind of wisdom.

This wisdom may be a counterfeit, leaving its victim stupid, though his comfort never be disturbed by the knowledge of his stupidity. His final goal, for example, can be mundane and his vision, consequently, the vision of worldly wisdom. His goal can be one of hedonistic devotion to pleasure, giving him a vision of animal wisdom. Or it can be a diabolic wisdom that sees all things only in the light of one's own pride. Theoretically, it would be possible for a man to view his life purely in terms of man's natural powers and to estimate those powers without error; he might, then, theoretically have the vision of the wisdom of the philosophically wise man who sees all of life in the light of nature's goals. But this is theoretical. In fact, man lives in a supernatural order; in fact, man's nature has been wounded by sin; in fact, no man escapes error in his own thinking; in fact, man cannot find his fulfillment within the limits of nature. (2)

2. S. T., II-II, 45, 2, 4, 5) Largely theoretical wholly inadequate.

The only available wisdom remaining for the true guidance of the life of man is the divine wisdom, either as it is divinely infused in us, or as it can be acquired from the starting point of divinely revealed principles. The first is the divinely infused virtue of Faith and its perfection through the infused Gift of the Holy Ghost. This wisdom is the common possession of all those in

the state of grace, whether they be nine years old or ninety; these are gifts that can be instantly lost by our perverse action. The second or acquired wisdom is the science of theology, proceeding to a body of conclusions from the divinely revealed principles of faith.

A discussion as to theology in colleges, then, is inescapably a discussion as to the plausibility of giving college men and women the only true adequate wisdom which can be acquired through the efforts of the human mind. Is there room in the colleges for the only wisdom a man can acquire? Shall Catholic colleges be concerned only with learning because secular colleges find it impossible to give wisdom? Is stupidity (the contrary of wisdom) an inevitable concomitant of learning? Must the colleges insist upon stupidity in their graduates? Understand, please, that I am not using epithets here; this is the technical and accurate word, stupidity, for the absence of wisdom.

With the question posed as frankly and honestly as this (you'll admit it is frank; I can prove it is rigidly honest) it becomes evident that there are two questions which never should have been asked in this matter, namely: can theology be taught in college? should theology be taught in college? However, these questions have been asked; indeed, they are the questions that have engaged most attention in recent years. I attempted to answer them (3) about three years ago; and am still waiting

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3. National Catholic Educational Association, Proceedings, St. Louis, Mo., April 1946. P. 239 ff. (Vol. XLIII, No. 1)

to hear a refutation of the arguments presented there.

By way of putting these questions to one side for the rest of our discussion, let me summarize their answers briefly. Can theology be taught in college? Well, if the questions means can you turn out trained theologians capable of competing with the products of a Dominican House of Studies, the answer is, of course, negative. The same would be true of a college course

in mathematics as far as producing mathematical wizards, or college chemistry as far as producing finished research chemists. But if the question is, can a human science be imparted to college students, can an intellectual habit, to some degree of perfection, be cultivated in the minds of men and women of college age -- well, the answer must be affirmative. A negative answer can be given only under pain of condemning all students as morons and all professors as utterly incompetent in this field. It can be done, for it is a human thing, acquired by the human processes of the mind of man proceeding from principles to conclusions. Every normal student can acquire something of this intellectual habit by the normal processes of work at it under the guidance of a professor with an ordinary possession of this science. The subnormal men and women should not be in college as students; nor, for that matter, as professors. On the factual side, the thing has been done, and is being done in a dozen Catholic colleges today. (4)

4.e.g. Albertus Magnus (New Haven), Rosary (River Forest), Providence, Xavier (Chicago), St. Catherine's (Minneapolis), St. Teresa's (Winona), St. Thomas (St. Paul, Barry, Trinity) (D.C.), St. Mary's (Notre Dame), etc.

If it can be done, should we teach theology in college? St. Thomas insisted that the study of wisdom is, among all the studies of man, the more perfect, more sublime, more useful, and more <sup>joyful</sup> gay. (5) Nor is he arguing about a perfect 5. Contra Gentes, lib. 1, c.1: "Inter omnia vero studia hominum, sapientiae studium est perfectius, sublimius et utilius et jucundius."

grasp of wisdom, for he insists "knowledge of most noble things, however imperfect, confers the greatest perfection on the soul.

(6) He maintains that "it is useful for the human mind to 6. Ibid.

be exercised in these reasonings, however feeble they may be" in comparison with the objects of this knowledge. (7) 7. Ibid. c.8

I have argued elsewhere (8) that this science of theology, this

8 N.C.E.A. Proceedings, 1946, p.242, 243.

divinely human wisdom, is the principle of integration of the Catholic's knowledge and the source of the perspective of wisdom, both of which are the distinctive boasts of the Catholic college. In strict justice, the Catholic student has a right to expect at least this from the Catholic college. Should we teach theology in college? Rather, how can we possibly justify the lack of wisdom in a college that is Catholic?

These two questions really shouldn't be asked. The answers are so completely obvious, while contrary arguments are simply evasions of the issue. There are no good reasons why the student's mind should not be matured by the science of the faith, as it is matured in every other line of intellectual endeavor in the college.

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With these two questions to one side, we can and should focus our attention on the really pertinent questions. How can you teach theology in college? What good will the imparting of this science do?

In approaching this question of how theology can be taught in college, it is essential that we distinguish the radical and absolutely essential method from the immediate, proximate methods which overlie this solid foundation. The first cannot be departed from in the inculcation of any science. The distinction between the two is something like the distinction to be made between the part played by the skeletal formation in determining the shape of a man and the part played by the disposition of the flesh on those bones. Without the bones, however careful you are of the flesh, all you have is a formless, shapeless heap. Without this radical method of teaching a science,

the student, in the words of Thomas, is sent away empty as a vacuum. (9)

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9. Quodlib. IV, a.18: "Si nudis auctoritatibus magister quaestionem determinet certificabitur quidem auditor quod ita est, sed nihil scientiae vel intellectus acquirat, sed vacuus abscedet."

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It is superfluous for me to outline this fundamental method to a group of college professors. Yet, for the sake of completeness, and because in this subject matter it has been repeatedly overlooked, let me say it again. To impart a science, you must begin at the beginning with the evident principles; go from them, step by step, to conclusions; from these more particular principles you go on to still more detailed conclusions, and so on down the line. Beginning at the beginning, moving step by step, down through the middle to the end. Any other procedure defeats the end of teaching which is properly the imparting of a science or an intellectual habit. If you begin in the middle, skip huge chunks of the intermediary processes, make your points by the thunder of your voice or the awful dignity of your presence, you may give the student some disparate information, an opinion, faith in your words --- but you do not lead him from a knowledge of what he knows to a knowledge of what has formerly been unknown; you do not teach.

To attain the primary end of teaching, to impart a science, you must follow a perfect order, with complete integrity of essential material, and by the rational method of proceeding from principle to conclusion. This is the constant burden of St. Thomas' emphasis in De Magistro, for this, above all, is the thing that must be said to a teacher. "Knowledge of Principles produces a science of conclusions in us. "(10)" The proximate effective principle of science is not signs but reason running from principles to conclusions." (11) "The certitude of science comes entirely from certitude of the principles: then only are the conclusions known certainly when they are reduced to the principles: ... not by a man exteriorly teaching, unless in so far as he reduces the conclusions to

principles, teaching us." (12)

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10. Art 1, ad 2um: "Cognitio enim principiorum facit in nobis scientiam conclusionum."

11. Ibid. ad 4um: "proximum enim scientiae effectivum non sunt signa, sed ratio discurrens a principiis in conclusiones."

12. Ibid. ad 13um: "certitudo scientiae tota oritur ex certitudine principiorum: tunc enim conclusiones per certitudinem sciuntur quando resolvuntur in principia: . . . non autem ab homine exterius docente, nisi quatenus conclusiones in principia resolvit, nos docens: ex quo tamen nos certitudinem scientiae non acciperemus, nisi inesset nobis certitudo principiorum in quae conclusiones resolvuntur."

Ibid. art. 1 corpus: "Processus autem rationis pervenientis ad cognitionem ignoti in inveniendis est ut principia communia per se nota applicet ad determinatas materias, et inde procedat in aliquas particulares conclusiones, et ex his in alias; unde et secundum hoc unus alium docere dicitur, quod istum discursum rationis . . . alteri exponit per signa;"

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The intellectual vision of the professor is the immediate principle of his teaching; but the teaching will consist rather in the transfusion of the science of the things seen than in the vision of them. The teacher is not a contemplative sharing his contemplation, but a man doing a chore in the active life by imparting the intellectual perfection which will enable others to see for themselves. (13)

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13. De Magistro, art. 4, ad 3um: "visio docentis est principium doctrinae: sed ipsa doctrina magis consistit in transfusione scientiae rerum visarum quam in earum visione: unde visio docentis magis pertinet ad actionem quam ad contemplationem."

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As a matter of fact, the teacher has a humble work, as humble as the housemaid's throwing up of a shade to let the light of the sun in; for what the teacher does is to remove the impediments to our seeing the light of truth. If he is at all successful, the sun will shine in our minds, we will see for ourselves the connection between principle and conclusion. (14)

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14. Ibid. art. 3, Sed Contra 6: "illuminare domum dicitur et immittens lumen, sicut sol, et aperiens fenestram, quae lumini obstat. Sed quamvis solus Deus lumen veritatis menti infundat, tamen Angelus vel homo potest est aliquod impedimentum luminis percipiendi amovere."

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Granted this inviolable method, the primary object of teaching, the imparting of an intellectual habit, is safeguarded. Any infringement on this method either as regards order, integrity of essential matter, or rational processes, will

assure the student of an empty mind though he may have a crowded memory. The immediate or proximate methods overlying this fundamental one will be dictated by such considerations as the uses to which the acquired science is to be put: in the case of theology, obviously the science can be put to use for the work of the priest, for the lay apostolate, for personal sanctification, for the fuller flowering of domestic happiness, for the perfection of the social order -- in a word to all the uses to which true wisdom is applicable. Other elements determining these proximate methods are the condition of the students, the time that can be filched for the course, and so on. The variety of these methods will be one of emphasis, of compression, or of expansion, methods of inciting the students to the necessary work, checks on student labors, and so on.

Most of the objections to college theology flow from a concentration on these immediate, proximate methods to the obliteration of the radical and inviolable method which is essential to all teaching. (15) When the primary objective

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e.g. "Religion for College Students," by Rev. William H. Russell (N.C.E.A. Proceedings Vol. XLIII, No. 1 Aug. 1946, p. 215 ff.) and "Towards a Theology for the Layman", by J.C. Murray, S.J., Theological Studies (March, 1944)

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is clearly seen, namely the imparting of an intellectual habit, it is hard to understand the truncations and mutilations that have been proposed -- and by teachers -- in the name of the immediate or proximate methods. It is hard, for example to justify the selection of a few chunks from the material of this science as being eminently and sufficiently satisfying to the layman's needs: say the Incarnation, marriage, the sacraments, the Mass. Or, on the basis of the interests of freshmen, to begin towards the end, upsetting the order of the science, with human details of Christ's life. The parade of a professor's knowledge in untouchable lectures which the student endures passively is inexcusable in view of the primary objective of intellectual habit; for a habit of thinking, of course, demands

exercise. Sheer boredom or laziness on the part of the faculty may settle for a "practical course" consisting, say, of a year on the life of Christ, devotionally treated of course; another year on the liturgy, liturgical prayer, the Mass; marriage is always good for a year, with plenty of interesting detours and blind alleys to keep the class lively; to fill up the four years, if the religion course staggers through that far, there are always such possibilities as "life problems", Catholic action", or "social Christianity."

In all this, we have pushed the prime objective, the imparting of a science, far out of sight. I have said elsewhere (16) "This divine science ... cannot be had unless

16 N.C.E.A. Proceedings, loc.cit.p.243)

God is its beginning, center, and end; it cannot be distorted as to order or substantial content. It is not to be had through piecemeal, or selective, presentation of this or that mystery; it is a body of related, tightly interwoven conclusions. Concentration on its sources is not a communication of the divine wisdom (Quodl. IV, a. 18); nor is a presentation whose complete appeal is to the pictures of the imagination or the details of history. Certainly it cannot be had by concentration on man or humanity, not even the humanity of Christ. In the very beginning of his Summa Theologica, St. Thomas had warned us: "God is in very truth the object of this science. . . Some, however, looking to what is treated of in science, and not to the aspect under which it is treated, have asserted the object of this science to be something other than God -- that is, either things and signs; or the works of salvation; or the whole Christ, as the head and members. Of all these things, in truth, we treat in this science, but so far as they have reference to God. "(I.1,7)"

What good will it do to teach theology in college? Some of its benefits should be clear from the considerations just given. However, to make its benefits clearer, let us look at them under some separate headings. 1) What good will the teaching of theology do from a purely academic point of view? 2) What good will it do the student group? 3) What enduring benefits can be expected of it among the graduates of such a course?

In answer to the first question, it is clear that the intellectual maturity conferred by the acquisition of an intellectual habit, or science, is an objective worthy of the endeavors of a college. For by this, teaching has lived up to its purpose, education is accomplished, and the student is thus equipped to further educate himself in this science; he has the equipment to think, to search, to learn. As St. Thomas would put it, he is now not in both an essential and an accidental potency to know truths of this order, e.g. infant and sight, but merely in the accidental potency; now all he needs is to have his attention drawn to the thing to be known e.g. point a finger for more to see. (De Mag. 1, ad 12)

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"videns non indiget ab alio excitari ad videndum, nisi quatenus per alium ejus visus dirigitur in aliquod visibile, ut digito vel aliquo hujusmodi. Sed potentia intellectiva cum sit collativa, ex quibusdam in alia devenit; unde non se habet aequaliter ad omnia intelligibilia consideranda; sed statim quaedam videt, ut quae sunt per se nota, in quibus implicite continentur quaedam alia quae intelligere non potest nisi per officium rationis ea quae in principiis implicite continentur, explicando; unde ad hujusmodi cognoscenda, antequam habitum habeat, non solum est in potentia accidentali, sed etiam in potentia essentiali; indiget enim motore, qui reducat eum in actum per doctrinam. . . : quo non indiget ille qui habitualiter jam aliquid novit. Doctor ergo excitat intellectum ad sciendum illa quae docet, sicut motore essentialis educens de potentia in actum; sed ostendens rem aliquam visui corporali, excitat eum sicut motor per accidens; prout etiam habens habitum scientiae potest excitari ad considerandum de aliquo."

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When the science in question is theology, the student is being given intellectual maturity in his faith to match the mental maturity he acquires in college in other lines; and is thus equipped to further educate himself, to use the intellectual tool of habit.

Taking the thing comparatively, this intellectual habit of theology will give more of perfection than any other study the student engages in; for this is the supreme humanly divine wisdom, and in so far as a man gives himself to the study of wisdom he already has a share of true happiness. It is more sublime, because through it a man especially approaches the likeness of God who made all things in his wisdom. Because likeness is a cause of love, the pursuit of wisdom particularly leads to the union of man to God through friendship.

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18. C. Gent., 1,1,c.1 "Inter omnia vero studia hominum, sapientiae studium est perfectius, sublimius et utilius et jucundius. Perfectius quidem, quia, in quantum homo sapientiae studiodat se, in tantum verae beatitudinis jam aliquam partem habet . . . Sublimius quatem est, quia per ipsum homo ad divinam similitudinem praecipue accedit, qui omnia in sapientia fecit. Unde, quia similitudo est dilectionis, sapientiae studium praecipue Deo per amicitiam conjungit . . . . Utilius autem est, quia per ipsam sapientiam ad immortalitatis regnum pervenitur:"

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The penalty for not giving this student this science is, in this matter, to send him away intellectually empty. (Quodl. LV, a. 13) Without any name calling, but in the strictest use of the terms this means to send the student away stupid; for stupidity is the absence of wisdom.

How about the student group, what effect will a theology course have on it? The obvious procedure in relation to this question is to have recourse to the actual student groups who have had this course for a couple of years, or to check with the college authorities as to their judgment of the student group as a result of this course. I do most earnestly invite you to make such an inquiry. Among the things you will discover is that this science rapidly becomes the leading topic of discussion among the students. Each class opens up new horizons which the mind cheerfully rushes to investigate, and students will cudgel each other by the hour on the interpretations, applications, significations of the newest things that are yet so very old. No, this is not an optimistic exaggeration. It is what should be expected. St. Thomas long ago insisted that the pursuit of wisdom was by far the gayest of all the studies of man because there was not bitterness in its intimacy, no boredom in its findings, but only joy and gladness

19 (C.G., 1, 1). "Jucundius autem est, quia "non habet amaritudinem conversatio

illius, nec toedium convictus illius, sed laetitiam et gaudium" (Sap. 8/16)"

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This is what the mind of man was made for, of course it enters into it joyfully; this is the mystery on which the mind of man is nourished and grows, of course it reaches out for it hungrily. Coming from one who knew well the bitter labor of study, there is special weight to Thomas' claim that wisdom turns bitterness to sweetness and labor to rest; (S.T.I - II, 46, 3, 3um) a claim born out by this modern student response to the science of theology. They find themselves, these students, plunged into discussion in all their social contacts; and why not, since this science will always have wider and deeper applications than any other. More profoundly, more quietly, sometimes with a certain reluctance, the student is forced into making wisdom's inevitable applications to personal life; and again, why not since by this science we judge human things and human actions in the light of the divine. (S.T. 46, 3 corp. et ad lum) As for the graduates, the alumni and alumnae, well, granted a proper inculcation of this science, you have sent them out into life with the intellectual equipment, and the positive appetite, to educate themselves further in this science.. They have wisdom, as the efforts of man can achieve it from the starting point of divine truths. Since everyone must order his own acts and judge them (S.T., 46, 5, 2um) you have put them in a position to live and act wisely. In concrete terms you have loosed on the world not only Catholics who are leaders, but Catholic who are leaders because of their Catholic wisdom; not merely good Catholics, but good thinking Catholics. The apostolic benefit conferred upon the millions of their contemporaries who stagger through life by the distorting light of false wisdoms is incalculable. You see, the wisdom of faith, the wisdom of the Gift of the Holy Ghost are gifts given for personal sanctification; they confer nothing at all by way of capacity to guide or enlighten others. If for this we are to depend entirely upon God, then

we must hope and pray for the gift freely given (*gratiae gratis datae*); on the other hand, the human acquisition of the divine wisdom of theology by the very manner of its achievement assures the ability to communicate it. We can be teachers of men because we have wisdom to give to them in the only way that men can be taught.

Perhaps the benefit to graduates is best seen in terms of the full implications of the absence of wisdom. For the completely accurate and technical term for the lack of wisdom is stupidity. That stupidity implies, and guarantees, a sluggishness of heart and obtuseness of faculties in sharp contrast to the clarity of wisdom's vision (II-II, 46, 1) particularly in the highest and most important steps in a man's life . (adlum)

This stupidity assures an ineptness in perceiving the divine light that dissipates the imprisoning darkness of the world (Ib.art2). Isidore had defined a stupid man as one whose soul is undisturbed by sorrow at ignominy and who is unmoved by injury (Ib. 1, obj.4); upon which St. Thomas elaborates by explaining that the utter depths of stupidity are reached when a man doesn't even know he is injured. This is stupidity at its finest, simpliciter; (ib. ad 4um) when, for example, he doesn't even recognize, let alone resent, attacks on his dignity, his family, his love, his very humanity -- the sort of attacks which are routine in American intellectual circles today.

On the other hand, this divinely wise man who possesses the science of theology, has the full heritage of his faith's treasures, the keys to unlock still more treasure rooms, the light to flood his own days and to guide the steps of others. He is an intellectually mature Catholic. Shall he be allowed to grow up in a Catholic college; or must he be kept at the infantile stage because there are so many important subjects in college we have no time for this maturing? It is time, I think, that we gave up the comforting pretense that there is some choice in this matter and admitted frankly that the canons of justice and honesty apply to us as well as to the rest of men.