

INTEGRITY

25¢ A COPY



March, 1951

Vol. 5, No. 6

SUBJECT~ADAPTATION

in regard to modern "conveniences," hygienic or otherwise. If they serve as instruments to further the aims of religious life they should be adapted without hesitation; if their only purpose is to pamper the body or satisfy the passions, they should be rejected.

Certainly personal caprice or a desire for novelty cannot be the guiding spirit in the delicate task of adaptation; only the desire to live more faithfully according to the primitive ideals in the midst of new conditions can bring it about successfully. In practice, only the constituted authorities, moved by prudent zeal and a deep love of real perfection, can bring about a renewal of an institution without changing its spirit.

If those on whom this responsibility for the future of religious life rest know how, in the words of Pope Pius XII, "to make their institutes seem new," then every order and every congregation will become a seedbed of apostles, a nursery of doctors, a flowering field of sanctity. Novitiates will be thronged with fresh and confident youths, anxious to run in the way of the counsels in order to find Christ more easily and sacrifice themselves more completely for the redemption of their brothers.

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(This article was translated and abbreviated from the Italian by James M. Egan, O.P. It originally appeared in a special number of *Vita Cristiana*, which bore the general title: *Problemi attuali dello Stato Religioso*, Florence, 1950.)



PRAISE, NOT SATIRE

Straight, with crooked lines He writes,

A pattern of new approaches,

Francis prevails without his birds,

And Dominic rides in coaches.

Isn't Thomism Outmoded?

In view of recent admonitions issuing from Rome that the Church in her varied fields of influence must adapt herself to modern needs and conditions, it would seem paradoxical that the encyclical *Humani Generis* should reiterate the ordinations of previous Popes that Thomism, both as a philosophical and theological system, is to be steadfastly maintained and faithfully taught. For if Catholic doctrine must be restricted within the confines of a medieval system of thought, how can anyone possibly conceive of an application of that doctrine which will be efficacious and in harmony with present-day systems of thought? In facing this dilemma, certain modern theologians, while manifesting the greatest zeal for an adaptation of the Church's doctrine to modern times, have shown an equally strong disdain for the traditionally honored scholastic philosophy and theology.

Let it be understood at the outset that the proponents of this new trend in theology are by no means numerous nor do they represent a universal tendency in the Church. The beginnings can be traced to certain intellectual groups in France but unfortunately they have found eager disciples in England, Germany, and the United States. By this time it is known to all that these persons were the occasion of the new encyclical *Humani Generis*.

The Argument Against Scholasticism

The apparently harmless proposition advanced by this group is that Catholic doctrine must be brought to modern man, whether he be intellectual or no, and in order to effect this, the doctrine must be presented in modern man's language. More than that, it must be adapted to modern man's cultural and emotional background because religion is an immanent and vital thing which is constantly changing with man himself. Now if the language of Catholicism is not intelligible to the man of today, how can we reach him unless we speak his tongue? If we further take into account the many non-Catholic sects, both Protestant and schismatic, which will not admit the parlance of scholasticism in any discussion, what recourse is left but to return to Scripture itself and the Fathers of the Church? Many non-Catholics will hear the words of an Augustine, a Jerome, or a John Chrysostom, but will close their ears and hearts to an Aquinas or a Bonaventure.

There is, of course, a great deal of truth in this new tendency and many of the men who support it are among the best thinkers and most zealous workers in the Church today. No theologian worthy of the name would deny that sound doctrine alone is not

enough; the theologian must also be coefficient with his age, being keenly aware of the temper of the times and the condition of man. But through their vague and obscure terminology one can see that the modern reformers are striking at something much more profound than language and methods. The Holy Father points out that if they only aimed at adapting ecclesiastical teaching and methods to modern conditions and requirements, there would scarcely be any reason for alarm.

Shades of Modernism

When one studies the doctrine of these persons on the value of Patristic writings, the role of philosophy in deducing theological conclusions, the teaching authority of the Church, and the nature of the supernatural order, it becomes evident immediately that the Church today is faced with a mitigated form of Modernism. The encyclical *Humani Generis* is easily accessible to all who wish to see the precise points of doctrine on which the modern reformers are in error, but it is interesting to recall the words of Pope Pius X, writing in his encyclical *Pascendi* in 1907, for they apply very neatly to the present condition:

It remains for us now to say a few words about the Modernist as reformer. From all that has preceded, it is abundantly clear how great and how eager is the passion of such men for innovation. In all Catholicism there is absolutely nothing on which it does not fasten. They wish philosophy to be reformed, especially in the ecclesiastical seminaries. They wish the scholastic philosophy to be relegated to the history of philosophy and to be classed among obsolete systems, and the young men to be taught modern philosophy which alone is true and suited to the times in which we live. They desire the reform of theology: rational theology is to have modern philosophy for its foundation, and positive theology is to be founded on the history of dogma. As for history, it must be written and taught only according to their methods and modern principles. Dogmas and their evolution, they affirm, are to be harmonized with science and history. In the Catechism no dogmas are to be inserted except those that have been reformed and are within the capacity of the people. Regarding worship, they say, the number of external devotions is to be reduced, and steps must be taken to prevent their further increase, though, indeed, some of the admirers of symbolism are disposed to be more indulgent on this

head. They cry out that ecclesiastical government requires to be reformed in all its branches, but especially in its disciplinary and dogmatic departments. They insist that both outwardly and inwardly it must be brought into harmony with the modern conscience, which now wholly tends to democracy; a share in ecclesiastical government should therefore be given to the lower ranks of the clergy, and even to the laity, and authority, which is too much concentrated, should be decentralized. . . . The ecclesiastical authority must alter its line of conduct in the social and political world; while keeping outside political organizations, it must adapt itself to them, in order to penetrate them with its spirit. With regard to morals, they adopt the principle of the Americanists, that the active virtues are more important than the passive, and are to be more encouraged in practice. They ask that the clergy should return to their primitive humility and poverty, and that in their ideas and action they should admit the principles of Modernism; and there are some who, gladly listening to the teaching of their Protestant masters, would desire the suppression of the celibacy of the clergy. What is there left in the Church which is not to be reformed by them and according to their principles?

Lack of Docility to the Church

Not content with the promulgation of dangerous doctrines, our modern reformers add to their mischief by refusing to accept the corrections made by the Holy See. Even *Humani Generis* has been met with lack of docility in some quarters.

What are we to think of those who, in spite of the papal decrees, which have been especially numerous since the time of Pope Leo XIII, have consistently and stubbornly held to their own opinions? The pronouncements have been crystal clear; each one more specific. "Nor must it be thought," says the present Pontiff, "that what is expounded in Encyclical Letters does not of itself demand consent, since in writing such letters the Popes do not exercise the supreme power of their Teaching Authority. For these matters are taught with the ordinary teaching authority, of which it is true to say: 'He who heareth you, heareth Me'; and generally what is expounded and inculcated in Encyclical Letters already for other reasons appertains to Catholic doctrine. But if the Supreme Pontiffs in their official documents purposely pass judgment on a matter up to that time under dispute,

it is obvious that that matter, according to the mind and will of the same Pontiff, cannot be any longer considered a question open to discussion among theologians" (Pope Pius XII, *Humani Generis*).

Saint Thomas himself long ago admitted that the authority of any doctor or theologian must always give way to that of the Church. But when reprimanded or corrected, our modern reformers and non-conformists express a pained astonishment. "What is imputed to them as a fault they regard as a sacred duty. They understand the needs of consciences better than anyone else, since they come into closer touch with them than does the ecclesiastical authority. Nay, they embody them, so to speak, in themselves. Hence, for them to speak and to write publicly is a bounden duty. Let authority rebuke them if it pleases—they have their own conscience on their side and an intimate experience which tells them with certainty that what they deserve is not blame but praise. Then they reflect that, after all, there is no progress without a battle and no battle without its victims; and victims they are willing to be, like the prophets and Christ Himself. They have no bitterness in their hearts against the authority which uses them roughly, for after all they readily admit that it is only doing its duty as authority. Their sole grief is that it remains deaf to their warnings, for in this way it impedes the progress of souls, but the hour will most surely come when further delay will be impossible, for if the laws of evolution may be checked for a while, they cannot be fully evaded. And thus they go their way, reprimands and condemnations notwithstanding, masking an incredible audacity under a mock semblance of humility. While they make a pretence of bowing their heads, their minds and hands are more boldly intent than ever on carrying out their purposes" (Pope Pius X, *Pascendi*).

Possible Adaptation of Language and Method

The doctrinal points condemned in the encyclicals *Pascendi* and *Humani Generis* are no longer open to discussion but something remains to be said concerning the adaptation of the theological language and method. When God revealed sacred truth to man, He did so in a human way; that is, He spoke in the language of His hearers. But, as is evident from both Testaments, He did not reveal all things explicitly and it is the role of theology to make manifest what is hidden. In either case, whether we are to expound sacred doctrine directly from Scripture or through theology, we must use the human medium of language.

Now the great difficulty arises, for words are frequently a source of contention and obscurity rather than a means of clarification and definition. This is amply demonstrated by the difficulties encountered in the various sessions of the U.N. To one nation a word may have an entirely different emotional overtone and carry with it the association of a host of ideas far removed from the cultural background of another nation. The same difficulty does not arise in the discussion of mathematics or the physical sciences, for these make use of a technical language whose vocabulary is definitely set and accepted. Philosophy and theology, too, have their technical language but never in the history of the Church has there been absolute unanimity in the use and definition of all the technical expressions. The fundamental reason is, of course, because sacred doctrine so transcends our created and limited modes of thought and expression that it cannot be neatly fitted into the rational categories. Hence the great liberty of discussion which prevails.

But as early as the Council of Trent the Church has now and again availed herself of the technical language of scholastic theologians and philosophers when defining or expounding sacred doctrine. This declaration by the Church is an external expression of revealed truth and is an official act of the teaching Church in her ordinary magisterium and not merely a transitory description of Christian experience at some particular time in the life of the Church. But even when adopting the terminology of some school of philosophy or theology, the Church in no wise intends to canonize any particular system as such. "Even in these fundamental questions," says Pope Pius XII, "we may clothe our philosophy in a more convenient and richer dress, make it more vigorous with a more effective terminology, divest it of certain scholastic aids found less useful, prudently enrich it with the fruits of progress of the human mind. But never may we overthrow it, nor contaminate it with false principles, or regard it as a great, but obsolete relic. . . . Whatever new truth the sincere human mind is able to find, certainly cannot be opposed to truth already acquired, since God, the highest Truth, has created and guides the human intellect, not that it may daily oppose new truths to rightly established ones, but rather that, having eliminated errors which may have crept in, it may build truth upon truth in the same order and structure that exist in reality, the source of truth" (*Humani Generis*).

"It is perfectly obvious," the Pope continues, "that the terms used to express these concepts both in the Schools and by the

Teaching Authority of the Church, can be improved and perfected; moreover the Church is known not to have always made constant use of the same terms. It is clear, too, that the Church cannot be bound to any ephemeral philosophic system; but those terms which by common consent have been composed through many centuries by Catholic teachers in attaining to some understanding of dogma, certainly are not based on such an insecure foundation. . . . Thus it is not surprising that some of these concepts have not only been employed by Ecumenical Councils, but also so sanctioned by them that it is wrong to discard their use" (*Ibid.*).

Church's Sanction of Saint Thomas

In the same line of thought Pope Pius X had previously insisted, in full accord with the papal tradition, that Thomism is to be the very touchstone of the Church's declaration of sacred truth: "The capital theses in the philosophy of Saint Thomas are not to be placed in the category of opinions capable of being debated one way or another, but are to be considered as the foundations upon which the whole science of natural and divine things is based; if such are once removed or in any way impaired, it must necessarily follow that the students of the sacred sciences will ultimately fail to perceive as much as the meaning of the words in which the dogmas of divine revelation are proposed by the magistracy of the Church. We therefore desire that all teachers of philosophy and sacred theology should be warned that if they deviate so much as a step, in metaphysics especially, from Aquinas, they expose themselves to grave risk. We now go further and solemnly declare that those who in their interpretations misrepresent or affect to despise the principles and major theses of his philosophy are not only not following Saint Thomas, but are even far astray from the saintly Doctor. If the doctrine of any writer or saint has ever been approved by us or our predecessors with such singular commendation and in such a way that to the commendation were added an invitation and order to propagate and defend it, it may easily be understood that it was commended to the extent that it agrees with the principles of Aquinas or was in no way opposed to them" (*Doctoris Angelici*, 1914).

All this is more than enough to substantiate the condemnation by Pope Pius IX of the proposition that "the methods and principles which have served the ancient doctors of scholasticism when treating of theology no longer correspond with the exigencies of our time and the progress of science" (*Syllabus*, prop. 13).

The answer to the problem of adaptation, therefore, must in the mind of the Church be found within the framework of Thomism.

Saint Thomas and the Fathers

It goes without saying, then, that a return to the writings of the Fathers is not the answer. Indeed, if their teachings have to a large extent been purified and evaluated by later theologians, why should anyone want to reject an obvious advancement of theological thought? For the Fathers had many confused notions and even contradictory teachings on numerous points of sacred doctrine, and some points which are important to us today, they did not discuss at all. This does not mean that there is no place in the Church for studies of Patristic literature or that we should not emulate the zeal and apostolicity of the Fathers, but if there has been an evolution of dogma, as the modern reformers maintain, why surrender the flower of theology for its seed?

Saint Thomas knew the Fathers well and it was unavoidable that he should have found much help in their writings, above all in Saint Augustine, Saint John Damascene, and Pseudo-Dionysius. Nor did he overlook the Greek, the Jewish, and the Arabian philosophers. All get a hearing and a judgment. For Aquinas saw all too clearly that theology, as queen of the sciences, must absorb something from other disciplines and at the same time judge only according to standards of objective truth rather than the authority of the one writing. The authority on which theology rests is not the theology of any Doctor or Father but the authority of God revealing and the Church proposing for belief.

Theology is a Science

Theology, therefore, is not revelation as such; it clarifies and develops revealed truth. The unity of theology and its immutability flow from the principles on which it rests and the very nature of the human mind in its search for truth. Theology begins with revealed truth and whatever is logically deduced from the content of revelation must likewise be true, not for just a generation or epoch but always. Man's goal in life is ever the same and the basic means to reach that goal can never change. Consequently what is the essence of Christian doctrine and practice in one age cannot be something different in the next. The clothing may be changed, it is true, but the theological body of doctrine remains essentially the same.

At this point we meet the controversy over the distinction between theology as a science and the theology of the preacher; in other words, the difference between speculative theology and

practical or applied theology. Though it remains substantially the same sacred truth, the theology which is studied as a science by the seminarian differs greatly from the theology which is applied to the art of Christian living from the pulpit or in the popularized written version. And it is this latter form, the applied theology, which must have the greatest flexibility and adaptability, for it is this theology which seeks to make direct contact with the faithful.

Philosophy and Revelation

Yet even in regard to speculative theology or theology as a science one should clearly understand the role of philosophical reasoning in the deduction of conclusions from revealed truth. The philosophical premises used in the theological arguments are so elevated by virtue of the revealed principle to which they are annexed that they are no longer purely human products but they become the handmaids of a divine science. To say otherwise would be to admit four terms in the argument and thus close off all possibility of a logical conclusion. If, as some moderns maintain, sacred truth is merely the instrument of man's knowledge, and this to the extent that the divine is absorbed by the human, then the supernatural element of revealed truth is annihilated, faith is destroyed, and sacred doctrine is debased to the level of purely human science. A destruction of the very thing which the moderns set out to save! But if theology is a divine science and true wisdom, then the revealed truth in any theological argument must necessarily be the active principle while the philosophical premise is nothing more than an instrument and handmaid.

The Thomist's position is that the divine truth sheds its light on the philosophical premise in such a way that the latter borrows the certitude of the revealed truth. It is nothing more than an extension of the statement of Aquinas himself that theology is the study of God and of all things else in their relation to God. It is this *God's-eye* view of things that runs through all Thomistic theology. But the moderns would look at the same reality from man's point of view and hence it is inevitable that they should manifest the tendency to fit God very neatly into their own rational categories and make of religion and theology a purely human phenomenon which changes with succeeding generations. Then the revealed word of God, instead of being the foundation and higher light for theology, becomes the instrument and tool of the human intellect and man himself becomes the sole criterion of religious truth.

Theological Evolution

Here again it is evident that the modern reformers destroy the very possibility of theological evolution, though they claim to be its staunchest defenders. The essential pre-requisite to any kind of evolution is unity because things which are specifically different cannot evolve; they can only increase by addition. But if the transformation of theology is intrinsic, then the very unity of theology is destroyed and theology itself becomes a loosely connected series of religious conclusions resting on nothing more stable than a man's religious feeling and the transitory milieu of a particular generation. If, on the other hand, the theological transformation touches only the accidental modifications of that science, such as terminology, method, and application, then there can be no argument with the moderns.

Only with these distinctions in mind can one subscribe to the statement of one of the reformers that a theology that is not *actual* is a false theology. Theology, resting as it does on the revealed word of God, is perennial and manifests a marvelous unity in spite of its growth; indeed, it grows precisely because of its unity. It can never, therefore, be considered antiquated or outmoded; much less, an enclosed system of thought. It is the pulsating and vitalizing word of God dwelling among us. As the Vatican Council declared: "Let intelligence and science and wisdom, therefore, increase and progress abundantly and vigorously in individuals and in the mass, in the believer and in the whole Church, throughout the ages and the centuries—but only in its kind, that is, according to the same dogma, the same sense, the same acceptance" (*Dei Filius*, cap. iv).

The Duty of Thomists

But while Thomists rejoice in the renewed papal approbation of the doctrine of Aquinas, they should at the same time realize keenly the charge that is laid upon them to make this doctrine coefficient with our times. Sacred doctrine should be studied for the sake of truth itself and the good of souls and not for any love of a system as such. Saint Thomas certainly would not want anyone to study his works just for themselves, as one would study history or literature. They were meant to be maps or guides along the road to God and although their immediate purpose was to train theologians, no theologian should ever forget the true end of his knowledge.

If Thomism is considered outmoded and even despicable by many moderns the fault lies not with Thomism but with certain Thomists. How many of them are mere sounding-boards, know-

ing only what is in Saint Thomas and ignoring everything else. Their maxim seems to be that if a thing isn't in the writings of Saint Thomas, it isn't true or at least it's not important. Others, like trapeze artists in a circus, are so enthralled with syllogisms and method that they seek to astound rather than teach. Still others lose themselves in the transcendent order of speculative principles and seem never for a moment to realize that modern man is hungering for the bread of truth and groping for a lamp to light his path. If it takes the threat of relativism and subjectivism to awaken such Thomists from their lethargy, then this over-zealous and erroneous tendency has been a blessing in disguise.

The Continuation of Saint Thomas

Let us admit once and for all that Aquinas did not say the last word on everything and that there are numerous things which he did not even consider at all. Let us ask ourselves what the Angelic Doctor would do if he were sitting in the professor's chair of any large university today. We know from what he did in the thirteenth century what his mode of action would be in the twentieth. We know from his prologue to the *Summa Theologica* that he would seek to avoid the subtleties of certain other teachers and proceed according to the order of discipline. He would also study and know thoroughly the modern philosophies, from Descartes through Kant to Dewey and Sartre; he would be abreast of all the tendencies and developments in the various intellectual circles; above all, he would realize profoundly the needs and fears and perplexities of our modern man. He would accept the proved findings of the physical sciences, as he accepted the science of his own day; he would take from Freud or Russell whatever of truth is in their writings and would profit from their particular viewpoint concerning reality. Then, evaluating all, he would make precise judgments as truth requires. Should modern Thomists do less?

If Thomism is truth it is also perennial, and if it is perennial it must be vital, not static. Its very vitality makes it adaptable and subject to growth through evolution. The Church insists on this adaptation, but always within the framework of the traditionally safe lines of thought. What is needed, then, is not the rejection of Thomism, not even its popularization, but a prolongation and deeper penetration. In other words, Thomism must be applied to the needs and problems of today's children either by an adaptation and application of Thomistic doctrine already formulated and

perfected or by further deductions from Thomistic principles in the various fields of thought as yet uncharted.

If Thomists accept the challenge we can almost certainly expect great advances in the various branches of experimental psychology, esthetics, apologetics, Mariology and Christology, and spiritual theology. Each of these branches of learning presents its own special problems which beckon to the sincere and competent Thomist. The words of Pope Pius X (*Jucunda Sane*) should serve as both a challenge and an encouragement to any worthy Thomist:

The times are indeed greatly changed. But, as we have more than once repeated, nothing is changed in the life of the Church. From her divine Founder she has inherited the virtue of being able to supply at all times, however much they may differ, all that is required not only for the spiritual welfare of souls, which is the direct object of her mission, but also everything that aids progress in true civilization, for this flows as a natural consequence of that same mission.

Truths of the supernatural order, of which the Church is the depository, necessarily promote everything that is true, good and beautiful in the order of nature, and this is accomplished most efficaciously in the measure that these truths are traced to the supreme principle of truth, goodness and beauty, which is God.

Human science gains greatly from revelation, for the latter opens new horizons and more readily makes known other truths of the natural order. It opens the true road to investigation and preserves it from errors of application and of method. Thus does the lighthouse manifest many things which otherwise would not be seen, while it points out the rocks on which the vessel would suffer shipwreck.

Finally the arts, modelled on the supreme exemplar of all beauty, which is God Himself, from whom is derived all the beauty that is to be found in nature, are more securely withdrawn from vulgar concepts and more efficaciously uplifted towards the ideal, which is the life of all art.

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