THE OBJECTIVE OF COLLEGE THEOLOGY

Urban Voll, O.P.

A Lector and Licentiate in Sacred Theology and a candidate for the doctorate, Father Voll has had wide experience in the teaching of theology at the undergraduate level, both in men's and women's colleges. Now lecturing at the Xaverian Brothers College, Silver Springs, Md., he is an editor of The Thomist. *He is actively engaged as a lecturer in the "Theology for the Laity" series in Washington, D.C.*

Any discussion of aim is likely to prove a thorny task. Motivation usually lies buried so deeply in the personality that the basic reasons for our activity are more often simply assumed rather than explicitly explored. In the very assumption there lies peril. The man who plods along the valleys of life with scarcely a glance at the towering peaks rising before him risks missing his ultimate destination. While a human being should be making straight tracks towards the vision of heaven, he may be just wandering through the shifting sands of life, not redeeming the time. Yet another danger—that of being misunderstood—awaits the one who, if not so presumptuous as to play the guide, would nonetheless (rather as a persistent gadfly) question half-conscious and obscurely formulated objectives. The answers as they emerge from the dialogue may seem either unbearably platitudinous or unrealistically abstract.

Still the effort of discovering aim remains imperative, for it is of the human essence. Other animals may blindly trace the path of life marked out for them by their Maker; as mechanical specialists,

they perform their single task very well. The human person, however, must exercise his own prudence under divine providence. Not only is the unexamined life, as Plato said, not worth living; the unanalyzed course of action may result in wasted effort. There is also that peril of perils, the awful possibility of ultimate frustration.

The uninformed might think that the importance of aim would be most fully realized and practised by those who live in what has been called "the house of intellect." The college campus is recognized as a place of human learning. This learning is sometimes supposed to be more than an amalgam of unassorted facts; the world legitimately expects that the academicians will give some direction, if not to the world beyond its walls (although that too is frequently hoped), at least to their own activity. Despite such high hopes, there is more aimlessness on the academic scene than professors care to admit. The pompous declarations of catalogs and the florid oratory of commencement addresses will not stand too close scrutiny. For instance, the accrediting agencies rightly demand a clear formulation of objectives; yet these same agencies are content with an evaluation of the means selected towards the achievement of those objectives, and remain very chary about judgments on the validity of the objectives themselves. If the question of aim is occasionally raised, there is an embarrassing pause followed by rapid retreat: "That, of course, is a matter of philosophy." Philosophy in this semantic context seems to signify personal opinion, even prejudice, which is beyond polite discussion. Another example of academic vagueness about aim might be taken from a current and somewhat predominant theory of education which consists in the formulation of objectives not in intention but as they are actually accomplished. This outright denial of the nature of finality means that we cannot know where we are going until we actually get there. As a concrete instance, in a large state university the department of philosophy (a place one might expect clarity on ultimates) changed its original, stated aim to a skeptical spirit towards all philosophies, when this result, according to student response to a questionnaire, was actually achieved.

Such confusion of purpose would seem less likely in Catholics, to whom a supernatural goal has been revealed. The Catholic educator, as a believer, accepts without question the advice of the Old Testament preacher to remember the last end, and is not likely to forget the command of the divine preacher of the New Testament to seek first the kingdom of God. In point of fact, Catholic educators, in official pronouncement, are likely to be extremely explicit about their ultimate motivation, which they usually assert is the greater glory of God, and secondly, as subordinate to it, the salvation of souls.

Granted this motivation (which must be present in every course in the curriculum of a Christian school), what is the special objective of the course in theology? If a place in the curriculum is to be assigned to it, the college administration, the Church and any other interested agencies have the right to expect that the end of theology is at least being sought. Thus, for any thorough analysis of the aim of theology in the college, the finality of theology itself must be considered.

While it may seem too obvious to deserve mention, there must be some agreement on the proposition that we teach *something* to someone. The proponents of student-centered curricula are fond of the slogan, "You teach students." True, but the transitive verb "to teach" has a double object, one direct, the thing taught (which St. Thomas calls "the object of the interior concept")[1] and the other indirect, in the dative case, which is the student to whom the knowledge is communicated ("the object of the audible word").[2] Thus learning must precede teaching; the teacher himself must first study, humbly contemplate the truth he is later to communicate. The nature and function of that learning has a primacy of authority as well as of place in the solution of the problem. Of course, those who emphasize the importance of the student are quite right in this respect; knowledge of a subject by no means implies, as every student knows, the ability to communicate. Thus to approach the problem of the aim of theology in the college one must ask questions about the nature and purpose of theology and the nature and purpose of a college student undertaking such a study.

The Historical Situation

Before entering what might be called the metaphysics of the problem, the historical situation must be reviewed. We are dealing here with something more than a sphere of abstract essences; we are rather confronted with an existential reality in all its concrete conditions of time and place, namely, twentieth century America. The American Catholic college of today cannot—indeed, should not—escape the ambient culture. God himself lives in eternity; the destiny to which he has called his children is likewise timeless, union with God himself. Yet the Word of God became flesh at a particular moment in human history in the hills of Palestine, and Christ's Church delivers his word and vicariously performs his action in second century Asia Minor, in medieval European monastery, and on the contemporary American campus. There will be helpful analogues from other times and other places, no doubt; nevertheless, today's college is a unique institution in a unique situation. Catholic colleges rightly trace their proud lineage to great universities in a glorious past, but a descendant is not by that fact the same as his ancestor.

Take, for one thing, the faculty of the modern college—clerical, religious and lay. If St. Paul manifests his early rabbinical training in his epistles, if St. Augustine remains to some extent the Platonist rhetorician in his preaching as a Christian bishop, it may well be that the professor in today's classroom, however devoutly Catholic in heart, is not always necessarily so in mind. Most of the teachers in Catholic colleges are either graduates of secular universities or of Catholic universities staffed by professors from secular universities. Teachings difficult to reconcile with Christian revelation may be imbibed uncritically in much the same way that young philosophers at the thirteenth century University of Paris accepted Arabian Aristotelianism. Until the advent of a vigorous, synthetic mind which can separate wheat from chaff, the ordinary student may rightly hesitate before the tables of secular learning. Shall he eat meats which may have been sacrificed to idols and thus risk poisoning his faith? Or shall he go away fasting into an obscurantist desert,

out of contact with his fellow scholars from whom he can learn much, and, it may be added, to whom he can give much?

Another problem which the Catholic college at this time shares with every American college is the level of instruction. The students by age and previous training are beyond that level of secondary education which the European tradition calls college, and yet are certainly not sufficiently advanced to that caliber of graduate study represented by the university. The college "level" becomes doubly problematic by constant shifting. Observers of contemporary education see the old idea of the American college as a preparation for a professional elite (represented by pre-legal and pre-medical curricula) changing to a general, terminal education for the majority of the citizenry.

But the present and immediate concern is what the Catholic college has done in its relatively short history to make itself specifically Catholic in its course-offerings. The emphasis on curriculum is deliberate, for, whatever advantages there may be to atmosphere, it is not of the scholastic essence, but rather, in the philosophical use of the word, accidental. The crosses surmounting college spires, the habits of monks and nuns adding sober colors to the gaily attired crowds of American youth, wayside crucifixes on campus walks, statues and religious paintings embellishing academic halls, even the chapel with its worship of the Blessed Sacrament—all these may make the "outsider" vaguely uncomfortable and the Catholic at home, while providing occasions of grace, but they are not directly relevant to the act of teaching.

Besides the atmosphere, some have seen the value of the Catholic college as somewhat negative. In it nothing would be taught which would be explicitly opposed to Catholic doctrine. History and literature, to take obvious areas of possible conflict, would be free of any anti-Catholic bias. (As a matter of fact, critics have charged that in Catholic colleges Catholic mistakes are minimized and Catholic contributions overstated.) Science at first glance seemed to have as little bearing on religious questions as mathematics, for the material taught remained the same, whether the teacher was a

pious nun or a blatant atheist. However, as the situation actually developed, it became apparent that the *weltanschauung* of the teacher and the consequent interpretation given the matter—even by silence—might not be without importance. Though such contributions of atmosphere and negative orthodoxy might be genuine enough, they have seemed small when the Church's heavy contribution in both money and personnel is taken into consideration.

Besides, there were more direct and positive attempts to teach Catholic doctrine in the curriculum. Only yesterday, if conscience asked Catholic educators what they did to impart religious instruction, they would have pointed with legitimate pride to the heavier burden their students bore in courses of philosophy. These students were enabled to face their confused contemporaries with the magnificent tool—one might say, weapon—of Aristotelian logic, the solution to some modern epistemological difficulties, an appreciation of the place of the Greek and medieval philosophers in the history of thought, and perhaps even a smattering of metaphysics. Their courses in ethics were quite specific and detailed.

While such riches are not to be spurned, a doubt has been raised more recently by some Catholic philosophers—in what sense can philosophy be Christian and still remain really philosophical?[3] If philosophy is, as still proclaimed in introductory courses, the study of ultimate reality by reason alone, how can it be directly and specifically Catholic? The boundaries between faith and reason may not always be clearly marked, but surely there are boundaries. If the Vergil of philosophy could conduct the seeker of truth to the borders of paradise, he must still hand over his charge to the Beatrice of theology as the guide to the celestial spheres. Philosophy performs a most useful service as precursor, but the Baptist is no substitute for the Christ. Nor indeed had any Catholic philosopher ever said so, though some college curricula might have given that impression.

What then of the religion department, as it was called? It was universally inferior to the philosophy department, however that might have ranked with the other departments. Poorly equipped teachers, with few classes at awkward hours and easy-mark status, wondered

just what they were supposed to be doing. They found themselves engaged on several fronts. First, there was a supplementation and continuation of previous training in Christian doctrine or the want thereof. Then there was apologetics, so necessary to the Church in the state of siege. This work had begun in philosophy with proofs for the existence of God, the spirituality and immortality of the soul, and perhaps the ethical necessity of religion, but it had to be continued, of course, in the religion-study of the divinity of Christ and his Church. Next, some inspiration towards Christian ideals was needed, and towards this end topics such as the life of Christ suggested themselves. Finally, there had to be some counselling in practical moral problems; this was usually accomplished in what amounted to an informal seminar called "Life-Problems."

What, then, were these teachers of religion actually trying to do? If their varied operations may now be evaluated in retrospect, it becomes obvious that all the functions were theological in character. To defend revelation against the attacks of the gentiles, to give, in St. Peter's words, "a reason for the hope that is in you" (I Pet. 3:15), is recognized as an important, albeit subsidiary work of theology.[4] To apply the principles of Christian morals to the concrete problems of life is the business of moral theology. As soon as any exegesis of the life of Christ or any part of the Bible (however elementary the explanation) attempts to go beyond philology, geography and chronology, it becomes explicative of revelation, and hence again theological.

Thus about twenty years ago the situation of the religion courses in America was such that a fruitful comparison might be made with the state of theology which St. Thomas discovered in the universities of his day. He complained about the multiplication of useless questions; that complaint might well strike a familiar chord in any teacher submitted to the question-box technique of the life-problem seminar. St. Thomas worried that beginners were confused by the want of a proper order of learning, since questions were treated "according as the explanation of books required." Père Chenu suggests that this would be a biblical order.[5] Religion teachers at first beguiled by the apparent simplicity of a Genesis to Apocalypse

chronology soon discovered that frequent repetition of the same themes begot boredom and confusion.

In the last few years the members of the departments of religion began to speak of their courses as "theology." This was not mere fashionable status-seeking; they insisted that their course offerings should present at least the same level of excellence and challenge as the other courses. As every effort was bent in that direction, divergent proposals were considered. Beneath this question of better content lurked the problem of aim. The battle for the existence of theology was hardly won when the victors found themselves confronted with an internal question of essence, which in itself depended on the more fundamental definition of purpose. The first national convention of the Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine heard the various plans proposed by different groups in 1955,[6] but a year later the question of finality came up for discussion. Two points of departure were used, that of theology itself and the finality of the layman.[7]

Doctrine versus Student

Thus the historical situation arrives at the same impasse as the "metaphysical" problem of teaching. The nature and purpose of the doctrine to be taught must be sought; the pedagogical art must be employed to communicate this doctrine to a particular student. St. Thomas' distinction between the object of the interior word and the object of the audible word has already been mentioned.[8] Professor Gilbert Highet, in a deservedly popular little manual, *The Art of Teaching*, makes almost the same point. "First, and most necessary of all, he [the teacher] must know the subject. He must know *what* he teaches."[9] Later, in his history of great teachers, Mr. Highet singles out the Jesuits as an example of the second important element —adaptation for communication. "Now how could the few [important] men be converted, the emperor, the courtiers and the mandarins? Not as a Dominican priest with Pizarro had tried to convert the ruler of Peru, by giving him the Bible untranslated, but by approaching them through something they already admired."[10] Anyone can recognize the soundness of the two principles invoked here: first,

only he who knows can teach; secondly, the teacher must lead the student from the known to the unknown.

Practice of the principles, as is so often the case, remains another matter. Apparently most of the errors in the art of teaching result from the application of one principle with a neglect of the other. Or, in other words, there is an excessive attachment to one object—either what is taught or the person taught—to the detriment of the other. Pizarro's Dominican was so bent on maintaining purity of doctrine that he forgot the Incas could not read Latin. The Jesuit missionaries were excellent at communication, but other missionaries complained to the Holy See that the Catholic faith was being compromised.[11] The Incas had to be converted by better teachers; the Church has at times to stem enthusiastic zeal when hard sayings are softened to make converts. The current controversies on public school education in our country are at root a variation on this ancient theme. The old-fashioned methods left a great deal to be desired in communication arts; the student-centered adjustment, on the other hand, has tended to eviscerate content.

Balance here is as important as it is to a tightrope walker, and perhaps as difficult to achieve. The balance can be maintained only by keeping the proper tension between the two magnetic attractions, the doctrine and the student. Certain teachers by the very inclination of temperament tend to be either scholars or shapers of men. Every college faculty has its examples of scholars who cannot communicate and leaders of youth who have little to communicate. Perhaps each could learn from the other to approach the ideal. The abstruse scholar must be reminded he is not addressing a vacuum or an academy of his peers, but a student; the molder of men must be more contemplative, a disciple to doctrine so that his influence has meaning beyond the communication of his own personality.

If it be granted, then, as a matter of common sense, that teaching has two ends—the purpose of the doctrine taught (*finis quod*) and the purpose of the student who is taught (*finis cui*)—do both these ends have equal importance, or does one merit subordination to the other? Virtue keeps the golden mean, rising like a peak between two extremes; yet virtue does lean towards one side. Courage, for

instance, inclines towards audacity rather than to cowardice. If the professor of college theology would, as a newcomer on the academic scene, consult his colleagues of the other faculties, he might learn a few things. Likewise, he might not so easily alienate himself from the community of learning, where he may be suspected as an intruder, a preacher rather than a teacher, more of a chaplain and morale-builder—not to say propagandist—rather than a professor of a legitimate branch of knowledge.[12] For their part, the biologist, the mathematician have no intention of revising their respective sciences for undergraduate consumption. They naturally select, simplify and adjust in order to give a broad, liberal knowledge of the general content and methodology of their disciplines. But they would regard any imputation that the college biology or history or mathematics which they teach was essentially different from the science they had learned as close to insult, an accusation of tampering with their material. The teacher of theology has even graver reasons for unswerving fidelity to the message he is called to transmit, for that message is of divine origin. *College theology, then, is essentially theology as it is taught to a college student in certain existential conditions.*

In current talk about the role of theology in the college, the statement that the seminary course is not the model of the college course has been accepted as axiomatic; in fact, the phrase has become something of a shibboleth. What seems to be overlooked is the objective of the seminary itself, which is not the preparation of theologians but of priests. The seminary should not only teach theology as something liberal, to be sought for its own sake, but also as a preparation for a function, the sacred function of power over the eucharistic Body of Christ in the Mass, and derivatively over the members of the Mystical Body of Christ. The point which deserves emphasis is that both seminary and college—and indeed any educational agency—should take a long, careful look at the nature of theology itself before putting it into the service of some other end, even though that end is infinitely higher.[13]

In one of the pioneer efforts towards theology for the laity, the eminent Father J. C. Murray, S.J., bases his reshaping on the prin-

ciple that theology does not exist for its own sake.[14] His preoccupation with the existential, historical situation prevents anything more than a superficial understanding of the essence of the science. In fact, in a later critique of scholastic theology, some doubt is cast on the validity and adequacy of Aristotle's concept of science.[15] Unquestionably valuable as Father Murray's efforts have been to discern the role of the laity in the Church, the sound metaphysical principle (which underlies this discussion on the art of teaching) that habits—such as science—are primarily specified by their object rather than by their subject must be strenuously maintained. The twofold object of teaching remains the focal poles of discussion. Moreover, several important factors militate against such subordination of the aim of the science to the aim of the student. For one thing, such an inversion of ends, if carried to a rigorously logical though absurd conclusion, would mean that, of two theological explanations, the one better adapted to the student needs would be adopted. Of course loyalty to truth demands that the more correct explanation would merit preference; in theology, particularly, the explanation which best expresses the mystery as revealed would have priority.

Furthermore, when the objective character of the science is attenuated for some other purpose—moving towards a student-centered science—the true and the good, because difficult to learn and practice, are likely to be pushed in the background for the interesting and the utilitarian. This in its turn could eventually lead to the forfeiture of the place of theology in the curriculum. Already proposals which involve "doing" as well as "learning" have been made. Such laboratory sessions would include liturgical participation, initiation into contemplative prayer, essays in apostolic aid activities (e.g., programs of witness and enterprises of effective sympathy for human beings in misery and so on).[16] One might wonder—how are such activities to be graded for report? But the promoters of such schemes have their own peculiar view of the college as a communicator of a "vital vision" rather than an institution for learning science.[17] Accrediting agencies, graduate schools and college administration, to say nothing of the rest of the faculty, might come to regard the department of theology as a ministry of propaganda and indoctrina-

tion, no matter how sympathetically they regarded such aims. The net result would be that theology, instead of occupying its rightful place with the other sciences, would inevitably be regarded as an extension of the chaplain's office. The chaplain in the armed services has at best a tenuous connection with the main purpose of the military; theology, in attempting more than its proper role, might be regulated to a morale-builder standing on the academic sidelines. Theology can demand a place in the academic community only on condition that it maintain its intellectual character, communicating a content and initiating the students in a methodology which are not duplicated by any other courses.

The Objective of Theology

Before speaking of the scientific aim of theology, however, it should be noted that what any teacher of sacred doctrine at any level intends to communicate is a certain content—divine revelation, and that in its totality. A sister preparing a little boy for his first communion, a seminary professor preparing a deacon for holy orders —both are communicating essentially the same content, although the degree of explicitness and emphasis are obviously quite different. This degree of explicitness is not a question of the gradual revelation evident in the Old Testament and in the preaching of Jesus; the revelation now complete is in process of explication. The inspired author of the epistle to the Hebrews mentions only two truths necessary for belief: that God is, and that he rewards those seeking him (Heb. 11:2). The current Act of Faith is a little more definite on the nature of God and the means of seeking him; four truths—the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnation, Redemption and Parousia—are named. Then an implicit formula, "these and all the truths thou hast revealed," is employed to cover any other revealed truths. The Apostles' Creed with its twelve articles goes into much greater detail on the mystery of Christ, though it takes but a breath from birth to death. The "Quicumque" adds many further explications on the intimate relations of the three divine Persons to each other and to the divine essence. Finally, catechisms, while graded for the different levels of elementary and secondary schools, still present in substance the same essential content.

Theology does no less, though in one sense it does a little more. Theology as taken here concerns the God of revelation, but the "ology" (*logia*) in its title implies an ordered discourse, a rational operation from principle to conclusion. There is something more here than simple faith. The believer accepts the content of revelation. God speaks; the man of faith listens and assents. But if the believer goes on to think, makes an attempt to discover the meaning of the revelation he has accepted, he is, whether he reflects upon it or not, theologizing. In this wide sense, every believer must be something of a theologian, as every man must be something of a philosopher. If the question, "Why theology?", is raised, the simplest answer would seem to be this: "Because it is inevitable!"[18] If the believer can and does reflect on the meaning of his faith, he can and ought to be taught to think correctly about those matters of ultimate concern which God has revealed. However low our opinion of the modern college student, few teachers would be so habitually pessimistic as to maintain without reservation that the young adult who puts in hours of laboratory research, reads the great classics in every field, grasps the elements of logic and mathematics is altogether incapable of thought. The older "religion" courses of the college were informally performing theological operations involving some explanation of revealed doctrines, their defense, an examination of revealed sources, and sometimes the use of logic or metaphysics and other instruments of human culture to penetrate the meaning of the divine message.

Speculation and Contemplation

It now seems generally conceded that the central themes of theology and something of its methodology ought to be taught in the Catholic college. While that position has apparently triumphed, some lingering doubts about the intrinsic finality of theology itself remain, especially in regard to the traditional idea that theology is primarily speculative. Perhaps the unfavorable connotations—"speculation" currently means something uncertain, such as the fluctuation of the stock market or the outcome of a horse race—might be avoided in putting it this way: theology is primarily contemplative. Even with such unfavorable connotations removed, some fear that pragmatic

Americans may not be charmed by anything which is sought for its own sake, especially when that is knowledge. However, recent interest in the contemplative life and renewed interest in liberal education and the humanities, which are pursued for what truth, goodness and beauty may be found in them—these may be the constellation presiding over a climate congenial to theological contemplation.

Students of Newman's classic, *The Idea of a University,* are aware of the noble efforts he made to establish truth as a good in itself. Knowledge is an aim, and truth itself is not really something man has so much as it is something which has him. Man is *not* the measure of things; the world outside is rather the measure of the human mind. It is a mark of intellectual health to be in touch with things external. To live in a world of fancy created by the mind, to ignore the reality outside, is, of course, in varying degrees an invitation to insanity. The scientist is objective; he sits down, first of all curiously, but also humbly, before the facts as they are, although he may later by reason of this contemplation be able to manipulate nature to his own purposes. The humanities make a good case for themselves in arguing that some things are worth knowing for themselves. Cannot an even better case be presented for divinity? The believer holds that the supernatural is as real as, in fact more real than, the world of nature; surely, then, he must consider that this supernatural sphere is worthy of intelligent interest—in fact, burning curiosity and serious study with the best instruments available.

Nevertheless, this has not been, nor is it now, the actual situation. The Jews, to whom God's initial revelation was made, seem to have been less interested in knowing God than in doing his will. Even much later the emphatically practical character of certain schools of Christian spirituality led some to think of the supreme revelation of God, his most intimate life in the Blessed Trinity, as a conundrum to be intellectually swallowed without attempt at digestion. In fact, when the intellectually curious attitude of the Grecian mind began to permeate the maturing Christian society, some were alarmed at the intrusion of such paganism, crying warnings against any league between the celestial Jerusalem and the too

terrestrial Athens. There will probably always be some in the ranks of devoutly religious people who suspect any intellectual curiosity about the object of belief as undue and inordinate. The phrase from that expression of the *devotio moderna* which is the *Imitation of Christ*—"What doth it avail thee to dispute learnedly of the Holy Trinity, if by thy pride thou art displeasing to the Holy Trinity?" —will certainly be quoted. Passing over the fact that other schools of devotion almost opposite in spirituality have produced great saints, and accepting the question as it stands, is there really a necessary connection (which seems implied by many who quote it) between the abuse of knowledge by pride and knowledge itself?

As Chesterton somewhere remarks, what is implied as obvious beyond question is sometimes more important than what is actually said. The miles of typewriter ribbon and recording tape spun out on the argument between the purely speculative and the practical aims of theology go even deeper than ancient disputes on the primacy of intellect and will to the very personalities of the debaters. Manuals of applied psychology offer various categories of personalities: the physical, such as cerebral, visceral; the Freudian electra and oedipus complexes; the Adlerian introvert and extrovert types; and so forth. At least as meaningful as these classifications would be the ancient division according to what is proper to man, his reason. That ancient division into speculative and practical men is combined in the Platonic ideal of the philosopher-king, an ideal which is rarely achieved. This natural division is found in Christian thought as the contemplative and active forms of life, and embodied in the Mary-Martha antithesis. If there is any truth to this division (and there must be some for it to have survived so long in the works of great thinkers), then it might not be entirely improbable that those who argue so heatedly against the speculative in general and against the contemplative in religious matters are more or less unconsciously motivated by their Marthan solicitude about many things, and some intolerance towards those who occupy themselves with the one thing necessary.

When a religious order representing a school of spirituality adopts a particular emphasis, that emphasis will most likely make itself felt in the apostolate of that order as a corporate personality. This

will also be true in academic matters. As a matter of fact, in a current discussion someone raised the question whether the particular spirituality of the teacher should enter into his teaching. Passing over the question of the propriety, it would seem somewhat likely that it actually *does*. If a religious teacher has been trained to make his meditation a spiritual exercise which must *always* culminate in some very practical resolution, it would seem unlikely that such a teacher would communicate any religious doctrine without explicitly drawing some practical conclusion. Since the thought precedes its communication, the attitude of mind which always looks for some norm for daily living is likely to be somewhat out of sympathy with a speculation it can only deem sterile, a contemplation it sees as fruitless. Thus, in speaking of the Christian kerygma, the practical Martha may just assume it is necessarily and always a challenging exhortation to activity. Some of the nuances of the divine love-letters (as St. Jerome suggests we think of the Scriptures, as loving communications of the secrets of hearts between friends) are surely going to be missed by such a person. The spirit of wondering adoration and affective love embodied in St. Paul's *O altitudo* will be passed over quickly to get to the practical, ethical, personal application.

Theology as Practical

This by no means should be taken as an attack on the practical. As we shall see very shortly, the practical is an important, even necessary part of the aim of theology itself. What is under attack here is the anti-speculative, anti-contemplative virus which lurks under many a proposal, not only for a student-centered curriculum, but for revisions in the content of theology itself, so that the Mystical Body of Christ or the economy of salvation or the life of Christ are the absolutely most important themes precisely because they are considered to have more practical impact. It is always a sad thing, a tragedy, when the speculative thinkers are exiled from the academic community, the one place they surely belong. It is a good thing when the contemplative is honored in the Christian community, for these souls are more directly occupied with the real and ultimate

purpose of the Christian life. A professor in a Catholic college who is even by attitude anti-speculative and anti-contemplative is hardly going to be able to engender in his students a respect and love for what is in reality the higher function of the intellectual life.

But the most distressing thing is that theology itself is perverted and battered since it is primarily speculative. God, the principal object of theology by its very name, is non-operable. Human science may at times overlook the contemplation of nature and concern itself with harnessing its forces; the divine science cannot treat divinity as if he were an instrument to be manipulated.

Happily, however, there is no need for those who accept theology as more speculative to be anti-practical. Here there is no "nothing but," no "either/or" antithesis; theology represents a Kierkgaardian both/and. Theology is unique in being both speculative and practical, for its single object, God himself, is both a Truth to be known and a Good to be loved. As a matter of fact, if one were to consider only a quantitative consideration of the various treatises of theology, one might conclude that theology was more practical than speculative.

But, besides the fact that qualitative analysis comes closer to the essence and thus to the end of a thing, it would be giving an unjustified elasticity to the word "practical" to include the inspirational. For example, the treatise on the Blessed Trinity, while offering magnificent material for acts of adoration, humility, love, is in itself speculative. Even while admitting the full vigor of the Thomistic principle in the study of the life of Christ, "his every action is for our instruction," it would be a dangerous half-truth to present the gospels as only inspirational and merely as a pattern for the individual Christian life.

It is necessary, then, to be quite clear about the practical character of theology. If truth as such calls for contemplation, truth as goodness has the further aspect of desirability. The theologian has for his task not only the consideration of God as he is in himself (God as the Alpha, creator of all beings outside himself) but also God as the Omega, the end and purpose of all his restless striving. In that restless striving, in human activity, something new is added

to theological contemplation—creativity. Certainly the heart and the flesh are in some way involved in contemplation, but the mind predominates. In the order of the practical, the mind is also involved, but the response to an end to be achieved through means is significantly entitled the "voluntary," from the will. If the major aim of theology is contemplation, it is not the integral aim of theology as it exists in the pilgrim still journeying towards his heavenly destination. Heaven is necessarily otherworldly, and any attempt to create a heaven on earth, even in theological contemplation, is false to itself, fantasy instead of reality, and doomed to frustration instead of fulfillment.

The Practical Aim of Theology

In insisting on the practical aim of theology, however, one must not identify the practical as if it were only exhortation or casuistry. Exhortation is not intellectual; persuasion and sermonizing undoubtedly have an honored place in the Christian works of mercy by which all are to be judged, but instruction, while in the same genus of a work of mercy, has its own specific difference. Even psychologically, overt selling in the classroom is not likely to achieve its purpose. The student who suspects that he is being "got at" through a sales-talk or commercial may arm himself with skeptical sales-resistance. On the other hand, instruction which leads to conviction is more likely to produce the desired action as flowing from the innate desirability of the object. Spiritual writers have remarked that genuine progress comes by way of steady meditation rather than by emotional spurts induced by revivalist technique. Moreover, exhortation instead of instruction, even in morals, and the consequent confusion of professor's lecturn with preacher's pulpit, has a pejorative effect on the theologian's status in the university community. There may be historical reasons why theology has been excluded from the secular campus and why it has been relegated to an inferior place on the Catholic campus, but one important reason for the present reluctance to admit theology to its rightful place seems to be a fear that the theologian will, by reason of his commitment in faith, be a doctrinaire zealot or an evangelist. If the theologian is going to be accepted,

he will be expected to practice a calm objectivity, a serenity like that of St. Thomas.[19]

This quality of the intellectual is best achieved by the teaching of principles in morals. Examples, of course, there must be; applications there must be. Moral theology is by nature practical, and the perfection of the practical is in the concrete, singular action. However, the distinction between moral theology (which, as a science, deals with universal principles) and personal prudence (which deals with singulars) must be preserved. The theologian of all people should be the first to realize that he cannot perform the function of the Holy Spirit and his grace, and that he ought not to substitute dictation for counsel, and thus relieve the student of personal decision and responsibility. It is not without significance that that gift of the Spirit which is both intellectual and practical is not judgment or command but counsel. In short, even though the end of moral theology is practical, it is a practicality of the universal. It is a scientific study of the true as good. It remains an intellectual discipline.

The Aim of the Student

Here it is necessary to return to the very important problem of communication, lest the content of sacred doctrine be assumed to exist in a vacuum, a library or only in the mind of a don who thinks students an intolerable interruption to academic contemplation. Sacred doctrine, to use St. Thomas' initial phraseology, is obviously meant to be taught. Now that we have considered something of the intrinsic finality of the sacred realities taught, once the contemplative act which precedes the apostolic work of teaching is presupposed, the student himself should be focused in the teacher's vision.

The theologian, then, must descend from the rarefied atmosphere of Mount Olympus to the busy marketplace of the Agora. Or perhaps it would be more in the religious context to change the metaphor to a Moses descending from Mount Sinai to his and God's people on the plain below. The intention of the image here is not to suggest that the children of Israel may be busy worshipping a golden calf (though that may at times be the situation), but that they are indeed the children of the covenant.

By this is meant that the students must first of all be Catholics, that is, faithful, people with a personal commitment to God's word. Other auditors may be present, and it may be possible to present the material of sacred doctrine to them (although the method should then be apologetic, *contra Gentiles,* rather than expository). Unbelievers are in the minority in a class for Catholic theology, and certainly a separate approach for them is highly desirable. But their mention here serves to underline the absolute necessity of the student's assent to the principles of theology—the revelation of God, the teaching of his Church. This assent is no mere suspension of judgment, no poetic credulity given for the moment to appreciate the voyages of Ulysses or the journeys of Dante or Jules Verne. Entertainment by a teller of tales has its place, no doubt, but the confrontation of reality, even though it be an invisible reality, offers an infinitely higher and much more important challenge. The topography of the land of Oz and the constitution of the heavenly Jerusalem, however superficially similar, are really not in the same class.

Therefore the student of theology must have the infused faith which baptism gives; if he has not, he is no more in a position to study theology than the would-be student of geometry who cannot see the self-evident axioms with which his study must begin. Once *it is* admitted that the subject or material cause, the student, is a member of the faithful, it can easily be seen how the ultimate aim of theology itself and the student dovetail. St. Thomas tells us in his opening articles that another, sacred teaching is needed besides the philosophical disciplines *for human salvation.* The ritual for baptism has the priest engaged in an illuminating dialogue with the catechumen: "What do you ask of the Church of God? Faith. What does faith offer you? *Everlasting life.*"

Now obviously the faith which offers everlasting life is that which works through charity, living faith fruitful in good works, for the priest continues: "If, then, it is life that you wish to enter, keep the commandments. Love the Lord your God with your whole heart, and with your whole soul, and with your whole mind; and love your neighbor as you love yourself." Which brings up the important question—is the faith which is presupposed in the student necessarily

a living faith, that is, must the student be in the state of grace? Wholeheartedly granting the desirability, we must admit that here we must be realist. One advocate of college theology presents an excellent analysis of actual students and breaks them down into an upper group of "supernaturalists," a lower group of "quasi-secularists," and a middle "average" group.[20] Perhaps it would not be completely foreign to the analysis to give the groups theological tags. The upper group would be those with living faith; they are described indeed as "doers of the word." Those in the lower group might with hesitation be said to have dead faith; they are found apathetic and antagonistic, with an almost violent desire to escape the moral consequences of belief. The reasons for hesitation in such classification go quite beyond the fact that the majority will be found in the middle group, which varies too much for any categorizing; actually, since God alone dwells in the mind, and we ourselves do not know whether we are deserving of praise or blame, we are not in a position to judge the state of soul of a student, any more than we are in a position to judge his predestination. However, we are certain of God's universal salvific will, of the universal efficacy of Christ's passion, and these imply in the moral order that charity, which includes the effective charity of this spiritual work of mercy—teaching—be extended not only to the actual friends of God but even to those who are only potentially so. Since the circumstances confine us to those who are, as St. Paul says, of "the household of the faith," there is at least some consolation in dealing with those whose potency to be members of Christ is at least actuated by some kind of faith and hope.

The Student as Christian

It has already been mentioned that the teacher of college theology has a great deal to learn from his colleagues who are expert in the other sciences. This openness of the theologian is not only useful as a means of forging an instrument by which the principles of revelation can in some manner be penetrated; there is also much to be learned about the nature of the student. However, it is precisely in this area of the *ultimate* end of the student that the theologian has nothing to learn from other human agencies, and, in fact, has everything to teach.

The theologian has to theologize, not only about theology, but about his act of teaching—a spiritual work of mercy—and about his student. The student, he must remind himself and any others who tend to forget it, is a creature of God, fallen through sin, redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ, and destined for the beatific vision of the Blessed Trinity.

Here, however, the ultimateness of his view must not betray him into forgetting proximate ends, any more than the ultimateness of the end of Catholic education should make the Catholic administrator forget proximate and intermediate goals. This remark is to be taken as a judicious criticism of the evangelical approach in the classroom. While recalling the glorious supernatural destiny of the Christian, the teacher should also remember that this Christian is a student here and now, not a member of the Sunday congregation, much less a penitent seeking direction on his personal problems.

If there are some who seem to stress the ultimate end, there are others who seem to go to the other extreme to stress an aim which is too proximate. These latter are preoccupied with the role of the layman and his apostolate in the modern world. These considerations are by no means irrelevant; the discussion of the baptismal and confirmation characters in relation to Catholic Action is vital to the entire problem. But it is not the whole problem. Passing over the fact that some courses in college theology are offered to clerical and religious students, the danger in rearranging the entire concept of theology for the benefit of lay apostles is that it narrows and restricts the student. Apologetic themes and techniques are likely to assume proportions which are unrealistic. The soul of the apostolate, we are reminded, is the interior life, which is best nourished by doctrine and sound spiritual theology as normative. The circumstances of life as well as the inability of some will not permit every Catholic alumnus and alumna to be an apostle in the strictest sense. Some may be restricted in their apostolate to good example. Even those who are in a favorable position for the apostolate will be best prepared by the explication of the faith, for the apostolate which the college graduate as such should be prepared for is the intellectual apostolate. No doubt

the rich veins of theological lore that are being mined on the lay priesthood and on terrestrial realities are of immense value and should receive special emphasis in the college. However, this emphasis on the part of the divine economy of salvation should not loom so large as to obscure other treasures of the divine message which are preludes to the vision of the Three Persons who, even now, we may hope, inhabit the soul of the student.

The Concern of the Teacher

"Even now" serves to underline the immediacy of the situation apropos of the student. Here is a Christian at a particular stage of development, not only physical and intellectual, but even supernatural, and with a particular present vocation, that of student. Other educators inform us that psychological and emotional maturity lag behind physical adulthood. With a tragic frequency, the human animal reaches complete growth, is capable of reproducing itself sexually without a corresponding intellectual maturity, either speculative or practical, which would give sufficient grounds for a hopeful prognosis of success in human life, particularly in its marital and parental aspects. Educators and counsellors are usually beset with such problems on the high-school level because of the incidence of puberty; less well recognized is the crisis which marks the transition from adolescence to full maturity which will occur in the last year of college or after graduation.

This is the general problem of the entire college administration and faculty; the supernatural dimension of the student is the concern not only of the chaplain but of the teacher of theology. The very special and direct concern of the teacher, however, is different from that of the chaplain. The vital element in the supernatural organism—sanctifying grace and charity—cannot be touched directly by any human agency; the chaplain, however, is the instrument of grace in his preaching and especially through the channels of the sacraments. Faith, the foundation on which the entire supernatural structure rests, is an intellectual affair having an object or content which is somewhat explicable and penetrable, and it is to this faith that theology addresses its appeal.

The faith of the college student is generally at a particular stage of development; it is no longer the simple, dependent, imaginative faith of the child, nor does it yet have the certitude, emotional balance and unromantic decisiveness of the adult's faith. In this transitional period, faith is likely to be at once idealistic and then again rationalist and suspicious.[21] Introspection and the problems of temptation and guilt harass the student in his personal life. Similarly, those who consider the aims of the student will do well to remember the many other disciplines which the student is learning. Obviously natural science raises many questions, but so also do sociology, history and literature.

If education is, as St. Thomas claimed, a self-active work of the student, the teacher is relegated to the humble role of presenting the material to the active intelligence of the student, who can be illumined and strengthened directly only by the Father of lights himself. In the instance of theology, moreover, the teacher may hope for divine assistance of an even higher order. Provided the student has faith living with love, the Holy Spirit may be expected to activate his gifts of understanding, knowledge, wisdom and counsel, to say nothing of all the support given the intelligence from the appetitive virtues and gifts.

The Summary

To sum up then, it may be said that the aim of the college student is immediately to begin the work of theologizing, to use his reason illumined by faith and assisted by all the natural intellectual virtues for a more fruitful understanding of God's word of salvation. This more fruitful understanding will be a tremendous help, not only in his terrestrial vocation, but as a means towards his supernatural and ultimate vocation in Christ Jesus. The teacher will assist him in this noble task, not only by presenting the data of revelation, but by using the insights into reality which the student is receiving in his other studies—science, the humanities and, particularly, philosophy. The teacher will be mindful of the differences in his students, not only in intellectual ability, but in cultural background (the "major" or area of concentration would need special care) and perhaps most

important, in spiritual attitude. Nor should the particular, special vocation of the student be neglected. (For instance, the theological education of men will have to take into account masculine logic as well as the disinclination to practical implementation. The theological education of women must take into account feminine intuition and some impatience with truth for itself, when not seen as also good and beautiful.) The respective roles of fatherhood and motherhood cannot be rightfully ignored if all the ends of the student in due hierarchy are to receive their proper proportion.

In conclusion, two particular difficulties in an essay of this type should be pointed out, not to fend off rightful criticism, but to explain. First, the vagueness of generality is almost unavoidable in an exploration of aims, which, in one sense, are not real until they are realized. This is further complicated by the experimental nature and novelty of theology in the colleges. A biologist would perhaps have less agony in explaining his role in the college, but then he would not have to explain it, as the academic community accepts him as a founding father with clearly recognized status. Secondly, the consideration of so many aims—and some of them so idealistic as to seem almost impossible of realization—may give this discussion an air of impracticability. That too is inevitable. An ideal easily realized is hardly worth the trouble. All the prudence and art of the teacher is challenged to do what he can towards the ideal. In any event, he can, as the doctor of Christian truth, have confidence in divine help.

Footnotes to Study 4

[1]*Summa,* II-II, q. 181, a. 3.

[2]*Loc cit.* Cf. the good use made of this distinction by Charles F. Donovan, S.J., in "The Teacher's Twofold Allegiance," *Catholic Educational Review* LVIII (1960), 7.

[3]The name of Professor Étienne Gilson has been associated with the discussion. While there are numerous books and articles on this matter, I would suggest "Thomas Aquinas and Our Colleagues," in *A Gilson Reader,* ed. Anton C. Pegis (Garden City: Image Books, 1957), 278-297, precisely because it takes up the practical and difficult problem of philosophy in the Catholic college.

[4]Cf. *The Work of Theology* by Francisco P. Muniz, O.P. (Washington: The Thomist Press, 1953), 31-33.

[5]*Introduction à l'Étude de S. Thomas d'Aquin* (Montréal: Institut d'Études Médiévales, 1950).

[6]*Proceedings of the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine,* I (1955), *passim.*

[7]*Ibid.,* II (1956), 10-46. Gerald Van Ackeren, S.J., discussed the finality of the college course in the light of theology; Francis M. Keating, S.J., in the light of the layman.

[8]Cf. *Summa,* II-II, q. 181, a. 3.

[9]*The Art of Teaching* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 12.

[10]*Ibid.,* 197. Cf. also the passage on Jesuit insistence on the principle of adaptability on the preceding page. "Again and again they repeat that pupils differ, classes differ, ages differ, and that the teacher's duty is to teach not an abstraction, but the particular collection of boys he has in front of him."

[11]A brief statement of the Chinese rites controversy and the problem is given by Neill and Schmandt, *History of the Catholic Church* (Milwaukee: Bruce, 1957), 425 f.

[12]"Religion in the State University," by Gerard Sloyan, *Commonweal,* LXXI (1959), 7-10.

[13]Cf. the discussion on "The Responsibility of the Sacred Doctrine Teacher Precisely as Such for the Catholic Formation of the Student" by Joseph S. McCormack, O.P., *Proceedings of the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine,* II (1956), 65-69.

[14]"Towards a Theology for the Layman: The Problem of Its Finality," *Theological Studies,* V (1944), 47.

[15]*Ibid.,* 361-2.

[16]These suggestions were made by Gustave Weigel, S.J., in a paper, "The Meaning of Sacred Doctrine in the College," addressed to the Baltimore-Washington Region of the SCCTSD, November 1, 1955. They were repeated with approval by Francis M. Keating, S.J., in "The Finality of the College Course in Sacred Doctrine in the Light of the Finality of the Layman," *Proceedings of the Society of Catholic College Teachers of Sacred Doctrine,* II (1956), 35.

[17]*Loc. cit.* Cf. also Christopher F. Mooney, S.J., "College Theology and Liberal Education," *Thought,* XXXIV (1959), 134. Liberal education is described there as "transmitting a spiritual heritage through initiation into a culture, i.e., a set of values and needs" (p. 326). In the same issue, John L. McKenzie, S.J., in his "Theology in Jesuit Education" (pp. 347-56), presents a conflicting view. All these writers are agreed on one thing—the science of theology needs drastic revision to tailor it for the modern campus.

[18]Cf. M.-D. Chenu, O.P., *Is Theology a Science?* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1959), 14-18, on "unwitting theologians."

[19]Cf. Gerard Sloyan, *art. cit.*

[20]Philip J. Hanley, O.P., "Collegiate Theology for Catholic Living," *From An Abundant Spring* (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1952), 259-289.

[21]Cf. the suggestive remarks of A. Liégé, O.P. in his article, "Faith," in *The Virtues and the States of Life* (*Theology Library,* IV, ed. by A. M. Henry, O.P., trans. by Robert J. Olson and Genevieve T. Lennon; Chicago: Fides, 1957), 34-37.