

On the Relation of Philosophy to the Theology
Conference Seward
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I suppose that many would consider the starting of the philosophate by the diocese of Lincoln as perhaps a strange move considering the fact that many consider the primary thrust of one's intellectual formation to the priesthood to consist in theology. Consequently, it may appear that the philosophate should have taken second place to the starting of a theologate. While there may be some truth in that, I personally have gone on record for saying that the starting of a philosophate by the Diocese of Lincoln was what I considered to be one of the most news worthy events in the life of the Church in the United States in recent years, for it provides the Diocese with the ability to ensure that the training of their future priests will be done not only according to the mind of the Church but also to ensure a formation which embodies a deep commitment to a holy orthodox priesthood. Moreover, the impact that the formation provided here will undoubtedly affect more than just this Diocese.

Philosophy, unbeknownst to many, actually does contribute in a very essential and crucial way to the intellectual, spiritual and moral formation to those who undergo it. For it pertains to philosophy to impart two things: the first is an organized body of knowledge, i.e. a scientific understanding of the essences of things which can be known through the natural light of reason, but it also provides the intellectual virtues necessary to engage in theology at level required for an intelligent priesthood. As to the first, the primary end of philosophy is to teach them the truth, not only about things, but what is the nature of truth itself. As we know from St. Thomas in a variety of places but more particularly in his *Quaestiones Disputatio de Veritate*, truth has a number of meanings all which are contained in the essential definition of the *adaequatio intellectus et re*, i.e. the adequation of the intellect with the thing.

The knowledge of the nature of truth helps a seminarian to understand that he is not the judge of reality, he does not determine reality, nor is he the measure of reality, rather reality is what determines his knowledge. St. Thomas tells us in his *De Veritate* that there are different kinds of truth. There is truth in the divine mind which only God and the blessed in heaven see. There is truth in things in that things conform perfectly to the Divine Mind and there is truth in the created intellect

which consist in the created intellect conforming itself to the thing. God, therefore, is the cause of what is true, not only in the human minds since He is the primary cause of everything that exists, but also since God is the cause of the thing itself; we know what the thing is when we conform our minds to that thing which conforms itself to God's idea of it. In the end, the seminarian learns that truth is ultimately dependent on God and not on himself.

Consequently, seminarians learn that if they want to know the truth about Revelation they must congrue their minds with the thing, i.e. revelation and since they know they are know that God is the arbiter of what is true and not themselves, then they will look to the Church which acts as God's voice and tells them what is true regarding Revelation and therefore they will see the necessity of conforming their minds to the teaching of the Church. This avoids theological error and promotes the virtues by teaching them humility which is the willingness to live in accordance with the truth.

Part of a good training in Thomistic philosophy is to train men to use their minds and provide them with the opportunity and material by which they achieve intellectual discipline so that when they approach theology, it will be from the point of view of reason and not emotion. They will realize that if they are to know the truth, they must conform their minds to revelation and not let their appetites and emotions sway their judgment. They therefore will realize that their pastoral action must be based on reason and not emotion for Scholastic philosophy helps men to realize that any time they judge what they should do, they do so by judging something in light of some principle or idea. Consequently, they will see that pastoral action can never be divorced from principle since one always judges in light of a principle and since they know that they must conform themselves to the truth, they must judge pastoral action in light of theological principle and in so doing their pastoral work will retain its meaning, Catholicity and, we hope, the joy that comes from doing what the Church asks.

A good training in Thomistic ethics, teaches them what the nature of law is and how it binds, by tracing the relationship from Eternal Law in the Mind of God to the Divine Positive, Natural, Civil and Ecclesiastical Laws and that by following the Ecclesiastical Laws they are doing the Will of God since one is obeying that authority which is derived from God and granted by Him to the Apostles and their successors. In so doing, they will realize that if they are to become perfect and to order all things to God, they will see the necessity of following liturgical law as a way of

following the Will of God because, again, they will know that all authority is ultimately derive from God and that by following the rubrics they are in fact doing the Holy Will of God.

Moreover, with the coupling of their knowledge of the nature of truth and the nature of law they will realize that to reach perfection they must conform themselves to the ideals of perfection as determined and revealed by God since they will know that they are not the measure of what is perfect, God is. Consequently, they will then see that the liturgy is not to be conformed to them but to God and that liturgy is not something of their own making.

With a Thomistic/Scholastic philosophical formation which helps them to learn about the nature of man, they realize that in their pastoral action they can base what they should do on a clear understanding of man and what is best for him and not one what is popular or appetitively appeasing. Philosophy provides them with the knowledge of logic and logical skills which trains their minds and thus gives them the intellectual virtues which they take with them to their study of theology and which provides them with a capacity to work with the teachings of the Church on a scientific level. Logic provides them with the understanding of how language works and so when they approach Scripture they will not fall into the many errors that some modern exegetes have, who do not understand the many meanings and natures of terms and words. As the Holy Father says in the recent encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* (para 56) “Those who devote themselves to the study of Sacred Scripture should always remember that the various hermeneutical approaches have their own philosophical under pinnings, which need to be carefully evaluated before they are applied to the sacred texts.”

This leads us to the next point, viz. a realist philosophy also provides an understanding of what composes a science. Since it pertains to metaphysics to study all being in general, i.e. *ens commune* and thereby judge what things suit and pertain to different kinds of being, it therefore pertains to metaphysics to be the regulator or judge, as it were, as St. Thomas says in his proemium to his commentary on the metaphysics of Aristotle, regarding what subject matter is proper to each science, even the theological sciences. For by studying the nature of being in metaphysics, metaphysics knows that if a science is to study something revealed by God that there must be a proportionate method to that object. While metaphysics does not actually engage in the study of the revealed theological science, nevertheless, it actually pertains to metaphysics, in the mind of St.

Thomas, to judge whether a given science's formal object, i.e. the perspective taken, congrues with the object of study. For by studying what the nature of a science is, the philosopher knows that every science is composed of three things, the material object, i.e. the thing studied, the formal object, i.e. the *ratio* or perspective taken and the method. Since the method regulates the ratiocination or reasoning process which consists in a series of judgments, even the method is regulated by the perspective taken since the perspective is based on the second act of the intellect of judgment. Consequently, by means of a serious philosophical analysis of the nature of the sciences, the philosopher knows that only a supernatural virtue is proportionate to a supernatural object. Consequently, when he begins his study of theology, he understands that in order to have a science of theology, i.e. a science of a supernatural object, one must have faith, for the supernatural virtue of faith residing in the intellect is that which gives the individual the capacity to look at revelation, i.e. the body of supernatural knowledge imparted to men by God Himself, in a way that is proportionate to that object. As a result, the philosophically well grounded seminarian knows that if one was to approach Scripture which is part of the *revelata*, he can only do so in an adequate manner by means of his faith, i.e. a supernatural virtue. He will not succumb to the various forms of rationalism which reject even the idea of a "theological science" since he will not accept the rationalist position which holds that only the empirical sciences are real sciences.

Epistemological studies which embraces a moderate realism provides the seminarian with the capacity to see reality for what it is and therefore he will not fall into the rationalist epistemology which cuts itself off from reality. Since revelation is expressed in sensible reality the rationalist must, in the final analysis, reject revelation which leads to a denial of supernatural occurrences, i.e. the miraculous. The systematic rejection of the Church teaching of Our Lady's Perpetual Virginity has been the result, at least in part, of a rationalist mind set. Only a moderate realist epistemology, as we see illustrated in the philosopher of St. Thomas Aquinas, is capable of keeping one in contact with reality and therefore in contact with revelation.

Metaphysics provides them with clear distinctions about the natures of things, about being and the different modes of being. Without a sound metaphysical training, seminarians are unable to engage theology with any depth and they will find it difficult to make distinctions. Perhaps the classical example is when a priest or layman asserts that Jesus is just as much present in the

Scriptures, i.e. the Word of God, as He is in the Eucharist. Without a sound metaphysical training, a seminarian is not able to grasp the notion of transubstantiation as well as he should. Consequently, without a good metaphysical training, the seminarian, later to be a priest, will not be able to make a distinction between substantial and implicit presences in things.

It is not really necessary to continue since it seems rather clear that one's theological formation heavily depends upon one's philosophical formation. It is for this reason that in my own estimation the decision by the Diocese of Lincoln to start a philosophate was highly significant and important. For if the Diocese can provide their seminarians with the best philosophical training possible, they will be laying the ground work to a very solid and fruitful theological formation. In effect, they will be affecting the seminarians for the rest of their priestly lives. The Church in Her Wisdom has known for many centuries that philosophical training of candidates to the priesthood is of the utmost importance. Without a good training in philosophy, seminarians stand to be debilitated in their theological studies and as we have seen over the course of time in the Church that bad philosophical training can actual lead people to theological error. It is for this reason that I consider the decision of the Diocese of Lincoln to be a very wise one indeed.

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