

## YOUTH AND THE FUTURE OF THE FAITH

My own teaching is limited to a graduate seminar for students due to become professional theologians. Accordingly it does not offer me any direct occasion for reflection on the proposed theme, "Youth and the Future of the Faith." So I have sought enlightenment from others and I have had the good fortune to consult a priest teaching a course in religion to first-year college students.

He notes that in the past three or four years there has been a notable change in the attitude of young freshmen. The hostility, the resentment, the violence that plagued educational institutions in the late nineteen sixties have given way to friendliness and a willingness to learn.

While it is true that former methods (stressing indoctrination and overlooking the need for personal assimilation) no longer work, it remains that current undergraduates by and large are concerned with their personal problems in believing and in living in accord with their belief. They are open to a faith that is as personal as it is propositional.

It remains that they feel that in their earlier years religion was just "pumped" into them. It all was so unquestionable that there was no possibility of it becoming part of them. But to overcome this block my friend begins each semester by asking the class to write out (1) what good each of them finds in religion, (2) what difficulties he or she feels about it, and (3) what they would like to get out of the course.

In this fashion he can orient his teaching in the light of personal expressions of religious belief and of religious difficulties. He finds, in return, that the students appreciate the faith of believers, respect theological niceties, advert to the struggles in contemporary society, are willing to soften objections they have raised, and can come to grasp the relationship between faith within and its outer expression in religious practice.

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The foregoing considers the issue as it arises in a particular institution at a certain level of instruction. More general overviews no doubt could be obtained by consulting schools of religious education, institutes of campus ministry, organizations of teachers of religion. But I should stress, especially in religious education, the supreme importance of what a Thomist would call "intellegere in phantasmate." Only from an understanding of concrete situations and of the reactions of individuals can a teacher work effectively in so delicate a field as fostering the assimilation of their faith in young men and young women. Without that understanding and without the freedom to use it, a superstructure of directives and an apparatus of organizations risk being trees that bear no fruit.

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There does remain however a larger problem. It is our unfinished *aggiornamento*. The scientific revolution of the seventeenth century and the historical revolution of the nineteenth constitute exigences for a remodeling of philosophy and for new methods in theology. What we have got so far is a renewal of the liturgy, an intensification of interest in sacred scripture, a liquidation of scholasticism, and an inability to proceed efficaciously from scriptural statements to the dogmas of the church. At the present time the disarray of catholic writing on dogmatic issues is lamentable. It is, regrettably, an evil that will not be remedied by the ordinary measures of watchfulness, exhortation, repression. What is needed is something far more strenuous and more resourceful: a new epoch in Catholic theology and philosophy that will meet the exigences of our day as thirteenth-century scholasticism met the challenge of Aristotelian and Arabic thought.

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