

## THE SPIRIT OF ENQUIRY

WHAT may be termed the empirical bent of modern education is, in the opinion of most educationists, directly traceable to the Reformation and the 'new thought' that arose from it. The teaching of natural science has, at least in primary and secondary education, almost entirely replaced the mediaeval study of philosophy.

Contrary, however, to modern popular notions on the subject, education in the Middle Ages was far in advance of that of modern times in essentials. It is true that a universal level standard cannot be claimed. For instance, in the thirteenth century, universities such as Bologna, Padua and Naples took students through a long and all-embracing course, while Paris specialised in philosophy and theology. Germany was noted for its convent schools where both elementary and higher studies were catered for. In England, the founding of Oxford University in the twelfth century and Cambridge in the thirteenth guaranteed for English youths a good all-round training.

Whatever the standard and scope of mediaeval education, it had one characteristic by which it differs from general education to-day: it was inseparably bound up with religion. The customary elementary course of grammar, rhetoric and logic was often the preliminary to a higher course that embraced philosophy and theology; and girls as well as boys sometimes studied theology.

Arising out of the association of all education with philosophy and theology was the fact of its stimulus to thought. Even the elementary course aimed at making the student a thinker, while the higher course, even when not specifically theological, tended in the same direction. The University of Paris, which fed and in its turn was nourished by such great minds as those of St. Bonaventure, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Duns Scotus, was only continuing

in its theological training what a lesser mental discipline had prepared for. And the effect of both was to produce a brilliant constellation of scholars.

It is true that the charge of subtlety and the over-refinement of nice distinctions has been brought against the theological schools of the Middle Ages. But nice distinctions are necessary if error is to be avoided. And subtlety at any rate implies thought, and is better left perhaps to the thinkers than, as it is to-day, to those who prey on the unthinking by means of fraud and confidence tricks.

It is the boast of those who decry the ancient system of education that by it the vastly increased content of the modern curriculum could never have been achieved. They argue that intensive speculation does not conduce to the acquiring of extensive knowledge. Actually, the exact opposite is the truth. It is the thinkers of all ages who have succeeded the most in adding to the sum total of knowledge: one who has been trained to think necessarily achieves more in a lifetime than he who has merely had his mind stuffed with the thoughts of others. And the vaunted strength of modern methods—the wide scope of the curriculum—is in fact their weakness. Not that the teaching of many subjects is disadvantageous; quite the contrary. But the teaching of many subjects to an individual is so. It is the attempt to cram into a few years what should be the occupation of a lifetime.

Unfortunately, the competition of modern times demands that Catholic schools should follow modern methods. But there is one subject in which the traditional Catholic method may be followed; the subject, moreover, which is the fount of all the rest: religious doctrine.

If Catholic theology, of which the catechism is a compendium, demands for its proper assimilation a mind trained to think, religious teaching may never be superficial. The truths of revelation cannot be put to the test of reason alone; nevertheless, the child will sooner or later (perhaps soon) be required by the world to give a reason

for his faith. And if he is to advance in knowledge he must learn to deduce other truths from those he learns, especially if he is to give a good account of himself when tackled by the unbeliever.

Religious truths are hardly understood at all if merely learned as the answers to appropriate questions. There is no science in which, given the premises, there is greater scope for the student to acquire, under suitable guidance and direction, a whole scheme of knowledge, whose usefulness, since it touches the life of the soul, must react on all other branches of learning. Religious doctrine is a subject which along lifetime cannot exhaust, and in which the learner has always more to learn. But in order that it may never cease to interest, the method, as taught in the great Catholic centres of learning from the earliest days, as well as some of the content, must be learned in childhood.

Besides doctrinal truths, every Catholic should know something of the *fact* of the Church, especially that he may pass on his faith to a modern world which is impatient of abstractions and demands positive demonstration. Missionary activity in all parts of the world and the existence of the Church in nearly every land is evidence of its catholicity and its universal mission. The missions provide a whole science of thought that is the more easily learned by the child because it demands the constant aid of the imagination. And it is one in which, because it is satisfying to the normal youthful love of the strange and adventurous, he will be the more inclined to make discoveries and so acquire knowledge by himself.

A spirit of enquiry in religious truths need not confine itself to the study of dogma and missiology. It should also be applied to the complementary study of Holy Scripture. Unlike those outside the Church, Catholics have no need to search the Scriptures in order to discover divine truths for themselves. But they do need, if their knowledge of the Faith is to be more than a little, to delve deeply into

the Word of God, in which Christ's Life and Passion is recorded, and Christ and the Church are both prefigured and mystically identified.

Outside the Church, modern research methods applied to Holy Scripture have tended to disrupt belief in the Word of God altogether. It is the glory of the Church that the spirit of enquiry can be safely cultivated only under Her protection. For within the Church thought is ever both old and new; She alone possesses the Eternal Spirit of all Truth.

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## METAPHYSICS WITHOUT ONTOLOGY<sup>1</sup>

THE above title outlines Professor Collingwood's project for the reinstatement of metaphysics in answer to Kant's question, 'How can metaphysics become scientific?' Since metaphysics has hitherto been a mistake about metaphysics, it was time something should be done about it.

In the books called *Metaphysical* (τὰ μετὰ τὰ φυσικά = the next after the physics = much the same kind of title as 'Collected Works,' vol. viii), says Professor Collingwood, Aristotle undertakes two tasks. The first is the study (First Science) of the presuppositions of the ordinary non-metaphysical sciences; the second is the construction of a science (ontology) of pure being, and therefore (natural theology) of God. As *first science* metaphysics is logically presupposed by all the other sciences, although from the learner's point of view it is approached only when the other sciences have been to some degree mastered. As *last science* (wis-

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<sup>1</sup> *An Essay on Metaphysics*. By R. J. Collingwood. (Oxford; 18s.)