

## TEACHING AND ST. THOMAS

### I.

THE author of a book on how to write advertisements for selling goods came to face the question as to what was to be done if the advertisement writer simply could not think of anything to say. His solution was—start an argument with yourself.

It is said that one of our great preachers prepares his sermons in the following way. He writes at the top of the paper the statement which he wishes to teach. Below this he writes: 'But it seems that this is not the case, because . . . ' and here follow various objections and difficulties. The truth is there is nothing like an argument, or objection, to make one think, or to arouse interest, as the middle ages so well understood. Every article of the Summa of St. Thomas begins with objections—that is, it is cast in the form of an argument with an invisible opponent. His articles are headed, not by a statement, but by a question. For example, 'Whether the Eucharist gives Grace?' And every article has three distinct parts: (1) objections; (2) the magisterial solution of the question, with arguments; (3) replies to the above objections in the light of this solution.

Why did he do so? The answer is, roughly speaking, that St. Thomas wrote like that because he taught like that, and further, he taught like that because he thought like that, as indeed do most of us. First we are set thinking by some problem, next we consider the whole subject and come to some conclusion, and, thirdly, we solve thus the problem which originally set us at work.

In the middle ages this was often the method of teaching. An important question or thesis would be considered. There was a gathering of persons of

various degrees of attainment—masters, bachelors, and students. One of the masters presided, and the proceedings would last some days. On the first day objections and difficulties were brought forward, and in this the students had their part. These were answered, as far as possible, by one of the bachelors. Next day the master himself gave a full scientific and authoritative solution of the whole question. Lastly, in the light of this, the master disposed of the objections and difficulties raised on the first day.

It was natural, therefore, that books should be formed on a similar plan. To-day, our books are different and our teaching is different. At the non-Catholic Universities there has been an unhappy divorce. The magisterial element is represented by the lectures. The students' argumentations are side-tracked to Unions and Debating Societies.

But our concern is with Education of a more elementary kind.

## II.

### THREE LESSONS.

In her interesting book on the *Philosophy of Teaching of St. Thomas Aquinas*, Miss Mayer shows how this method of old corresponds with modern practice in some places. That is: (1) the objections, (2) the magisterial decision, and (3) the solution of the objections, are represented by (1) the inductive, psychological or developmental discussion lesson, (2) the deductive, logical or authoritative lesson, and (3) the application or review lesson.

It is worth while to consider these separately, and we may as well take a question from the *Summa* as an example—viz., Can Baptism be repeated?

### INDUCTIVE LESSON.

It seems Baptism can be repeated, for, in the Gospel we read of St. John the Baptist baptizing people,

## *Blackfriars*

and in the Acts, St. Paul is said to have baptized some of them again. Also, if Baptism is to wash away Sins, we should expect that if people sin again they should be baptized again. Further sacraments correspond very nearly to ordinary bodily activities. The Eucharist is spiritual feeding; and Baptism is spiritual washing. But if the former is repeated, why not the latter? And so on.

### DEDUCTIVE LESSON.

Baptism cannot be repeated. (1) It is a spiritual regeneration, and we can be born only once. (2) It imprints an indelible character on the soul. (3) It is given principally as a remedy against original sin, from which we are cleansed once for all.

### REVIEW LESSON.

We now deal with the objections raised in the first lesson. The children may be asked if they remember any of them.

The Baptism of the Baptist was a different one from that of Christ, and, therefore, the latter could be received after the former. John gave his own Baptism; anyone now (duly) baptizing gives Christ's Baptism. Baptism is given, chiefly, for remission of Original Sin—there are other remedies for actual sin after Baptism—specially Penance.

### III.

#### BASIC PRINCIPLE.

Perhaps the principle of contradiction is the most important factor; and this can be stated as follows 'a thing cannot be and not be at the same time.' The objections are contradictions of the thesis proposed, and so give the lesson a driving force, as we are impelled to go forward and solve them. Every teacher knows how delighted a child is if he can point out any

contradiction in what is presented to him. 'But you said . . . .'

GENERAL REMARKS.

Its great merit is the clash of ideas. All games for children include an element of opposition or strife. Why should not their work have it also? It was a problem that caused Moses to go aside, 'I will go and see this great sight, why the bush is not burnt.' Children themselves sometimes produce real difficulties. A priest tells of a child who questioned authority in teaching by asking if it were not the case that the Protestant clergyman claimed similar authority over his children; and one man's word is no better than that of another, or words to that effect.

De la Vaissière-Raemers, in *Educational Psychology* (p. 104), say: 'But after this age (14) he shows a pronounced taste for *dialectics*. His emotions, his self-love, his lack of experience will often cause him to reason falsely, but, as Mendousse says, "if he is less reasonable than the child of 12 or 13 years of age, he is, without doubt, infinitely more capable of reasoning."'

CONCLUSION.

It will be no bad thing for the teacher, as representing the Church, to appear before the child as one who can face difficulties and answer objections. When a boy goes out into the world he gets a shock, not because the objections he hears are so difficult, but because he is not accustomed to have things put in that way.

On the other hand, we are constantly deploring Indifference. And what is Indifference, if it is not to be insensible to a great problem—the relation of man to God?

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