

Editorial

A GENUINELY PASTORAL THEOLOGY

THE PATTERNS of theological education commonly accepted in the present-day Church are in some respects very odd. Perhaps that is hardly surprising, in view of the fact that they have been shaped more by the casual division of old disciplines and the equally casual addition of new ones than by systematic planning according to agreed principles. But in an age of ferment and unrest both in the Church and in society at large, it is surely regrettable that the institutions and the persons responsible for the training of men and women for pastoral tasks in the Christian community should be—as they certainly appear to be—confused and uncertain, not only about their methods, but even about their goals.

One of the disturbing weaknesses of theological education as we know it is the fragmentation of the curriculum into a multiplicity of apparently unrelated subjects. No doubt the tasks of the ordained ministry and other special ministries in the modern Church demand much knowledge and many skills in those who hope to perform them to good effect, and we must be thankful that the intellectual gifts of both teachers and students in our divinity faculties and seminaries include a wide variety of interests and competences. But it must be confessed that in most theological schools the several departments show little concern to relate their particular programs to a clearly determined common purpose. On the contrary, it is only too easy to point out instances of narrow specialization and academic empire-building in the world of theological education as well as in schools of arts and science.

To the reflective participant in, or observer of, modern theological education, perhaps the most disquieting result of fragmentation is the divorce between "pastoral theology" and "systematic theology" on every level and between advanced specialist "training for the pastoral ministry" and advanced "theological study" on the post-graduate level. It is hardly too much to say that this great divorce has led in some cases to a "detheologizing" of "pastoral theology" and in others to a no less serious "detheologizing" of "systematic theology." On the one hand, all too many practitioners of pastoral theology behave as if nothing but "know-how" in communications and human relations were required for the formation of a pastor—in other words, as if there were no Christian message to communicate and bring to bear on human relations and human personality. On the other hand, all too many practitioners of systematic theology behave as if genuine theological education consisted solely in training in speculation and research—in other words, as if the Christian message were not essentially the

proclamation of God's gracious action for the salvation of mankind. In sum, much pastoral theology has ceased to be theology because it has lost contact with the distinctive content of theology, and much systematic theology has ceased to be theology because it has lost sight of the essential character of the distinctive content of theology. The unavoidable outcome of such a "detheologizing" of key theological disciplines is educational futility in our divinity schools.

In such a situation, the systematic theologians, as professional exponents of the Christian message, are surely called to radical self-examination. They must ask themselves honestly whether the systematic theology they teach is in itself genuinely pastoral, and if the answer is negative they must try to do something about themselves. Of course, they must not misconstrue the question as an invitation to reduce theology to an assortment of tid-bits ready for distribution by homiletic confectioners, let alone to a collection of public-relations gimmicks. They are not called to devote their lectures to "Homiletic Hints from the *Summa Theologiae*" or to "Pastoral Pointers from the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*." True pastoral care needs deep theology—painstaking and penetrating investigation of the substance of the Christian message—as its solid foundation. But as theologians they are called to expound a message that bears directly on human life and human destiny, and they must not reduce that message to mere speculation about hidden realms of being or to a narration of events in ancient history. They need to be expert in philosophy and in the history of religions, but they must be more than philosophers and historians. The "God" of their theology is the Creator and Redeemer of mankind, and their vocation is nothing less than to set him forth, in all his creative and redemptive love and power, to the race that he has created and redeemed.

If the academic theologians will only meet the challenge to teach a genuinely pastoral theology, their contribution to the renewal of Christian life can be incalculable. But if they fail to meet the challenge, the results for the Church's pastoral mission will inevitably be disastrous.

E.R.F.