

From the autobiography of Fulton J Sheen:

Being a teacher took up about a quarter century of my life. The career did not begin when I was appointed to the Graduate School of the Catholic University; rather it began in England when I was invited to teach theology at the seminary of the Westminster Archdiocese, St. Edmund's College, Ware. At the same time, I was working for my agrégé at the University of Louvain. I was assigned to teach dogmatic theology, though my specialty had been philosophy. Though I did audit many lectures in theology at the University of Louvain and later on at the Angelicum and the Gregorian in Rome, I was a beginner in every sense of the word.

One of my friends and distinguished colleagues there was Father Ronald Knox, a convert to Catholicism, whose father was the Anglican Archbishop of Birmingham. A graduate of Oxford, he was teaching Scripture and Greek at the seminary. Later on, he translated the entire Bible into English from the Hebrew and the Greek. Another colleague was Dr. Messenger, who was with me at Louvain and lived at a convent of nuns about two miles away from the seminary.

Each day Father Knox would write for his students a Latin poem describing the events of the previous day. One incident that gave him great scope was an explosion of the "starlight" equipment in the seminary. It was some kind of illuminating gas which was stored in the large toilets. The starlight used to leak into our butter and our bread so that we were constantly eating it. Of all the nights when the starlight plant should blow up in an English seminary, the one chosen by the starlight gods was the eve of St. Patrick's Day. We heard the explosion during the night. When we looked out on St. Patrick's Day, we found the lawn of the seminary strewn with toilet bowls. Knox wrote a brilliant Latin poem about it, but it was the last line which particularly annoyed Dr. Messenger: "Fragorem nuntius audivit" (Messenger heard the explosion).

I worked hard to prepare each lecture to the fourth-year students of the seminary. This particular day I was to lecture on the subject of "Theandric Actions." A theandric action is one in which both the divine and human nature of our Lord is involved. An example would be when He picked up dust, mingled it with spittle and applied it to the eyes of the blind man and cured him. But no theological subject of this kind is ever presented that clearly to students, for it is the business of a professor to complicate the simple ordinary things of life!

I spent hours reading Bonaventure, Aquinas, Suarez, Bilot and other theologians. When I went into the classroom, if I met a theandric action coming out I would not have recognized it, so confused was I about the subject, but I lectured for an hour. On the way out of the classroom, I heard one deacon say to another: "Oh, Dr. Sheen is a most extraordinary lecturer, most extraordinary." I said to him: "What did I say?" And in the best British accent he clipped: "I don't quite know." And I answered: "Neither do I." That day I learned that sometimes when you are confusing, you are mistaken for being learned.

Five years later I met a former student of St. Edmund's who was by that time a priest in the Diocese of Manchester. He inquired what I was doing. When I told him I was teaching at the Catholic University in Washington, he reflected: "I hope you are a better teacher now than you were then." But at least it must be said for me that I tried my pedagogy on the English before I did it on my fellow Americans.

When I had completed the conditions for the agrégé of Louvain, I paid a visit to Cardinal Mercier. "Your Eminence, you were always a brilliant teacher; would you kindly give me some suggestions about teaching?" "I will give you two: al-

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