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To Preach the Gospel
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**TO PREACH THE GOSPEL:
THE FIRST DUTY OF THE BISHOP**

**THEOLOGY AND THE
HUMAN SCIENCES:
THEOLOGY AND CONTEMPLATION**

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Two Addresses of
MOST REVEREND JEROME HAMER
Secretary
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

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**REFLECTIONS ON THE
EPISCOPAL MAGISTERIUM**

November 12, 1978

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TO PREACH THE GOSPEL: THE FIRST DUTY OF THE BISHOP

REFLECTIONS ON THE EPISCOPAL MAGISTERIUM

Address to Bishops of USA

WASHINGTON
November 12, 1978

“Among the more important duties of bishops, that of preaching the Gospel has pride of place” (LG, 25). These words of the Council echo the question that each of us was asked at the beginning of our episcopal ordination: “Will you preach the Gospel faithfully and unceasingly?” (*fideliter et indesinenter*)

That is the subject of our talk. When I was a young teacher of theology, I dreamed of writing a theology of preaching one day. It is very likely that I will take this project to my grave. In any case such is not my intention today. I would like to propose to you quite simply, in a personal capacity, some reflections on the episcopal ministry of preaching. I am relying on the questions you will ask me after this lecture and on your remarks to tackle certain points which will not be dealt with directly in this paper.



I

The Bishops

Evangelizing Office of the People of God

To preach the Gospel is to announce to everyone, Christians and non-Christians, God's plan to save all men in Jesus Christ, that is, to give them a share in those divine treasures which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind (cf. DV, 6).

The office of proclaiming the Gospel concerns the whole people of God. "The Holy people of God, the dogmatic Constitution on the Church teaches, shares also in Christ's prophetic office. It spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by a life of faith and love and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips praising His name" (LG, 12).

This prophetic or evangelizing office of the People of God—that is the Church—is based on the presence in it of the Spirit of God who guarantees its indefectibility in the truth of faith. "The whole body of the faithful (*universitas fidelium*) who have an anointing that comes from the Holy One (cf. 1 Jn.2:20 and 27) cannot err in matters of belief. This characteristic is shown in the supernatural appreciation of the faith (*sensus fidei*) of the whole people, when, "from the bishops to the last of the faithful" they manifest a universal consent in matters of faith and morals" (LG, 12).

This analysis of the "*sensus fidei*" of the Christian people is important in order to avoid reducing this supernatural reality to sociological categories. The "*sensus fidei*" is not the same thing as public opinion. It cannot be the object of Gallup polls. A group, however numerous it may be in the Church, can never claim for itself the guarantee given by the "*sensus fidei*", for a group can always be mistaken and the past gives us example of this. Nor is the "*sensus fidei*" concerned with laymen as opposed to bishops.

The "*sensus fidei*" is the work of grace, of this assistance that the Holy Spirit grants to *universitas fidelium*, and it is manifested

in the *unanimis pastorum ac fidelium consensio*, to use the expression of the great theologian of last century, Giovanni Perrone. Laymen are, therefore, at the side of their bishops and united with them. It is not a question of a confrontation.¹

Diversity of Tasks

In a Church that is wholly evangelizing, there is a diversity of tasks. The Holy Spirit who ensures that the Church will remain in truth, also distributes among the faithful of every rank special graces by which "he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church" (LG, 12).

It is a question here of charisms, that is, of gifts of divine generosity which are given, in the first place, not for the benefit of the one who receives them, but in favor of the whole community of the faithful.

Let us take care here not to oppose charisms and ministries, as is sometimes done; nothing would be more contrary to St. Paul's thought. The apostle enumerates a great many of these spiritual gifts and we have every reason to believe that his enumerations are not complete. Certain gifts are of a transitory or even exceptional character such as the gift of miracles or that of speaking in tongues, but others are permanent by nature, they are public, regular offices, which are entrusted by the imposition of hands and prayer. Among these institutional ministries, charisms and gifts of the Spirit, as much and even more than the most miraculous gifts, is the episcopate. It is through this ministry that the divine mission entrusted by Christ to the apostles and destined to last until the end of time, is continued in the Church (cf. LG, 20).

The Ministry of the Bishop

What is the role of the episcopate in an evangelizing Church? The apostolic exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi* sums up the thought of the Church on this point: "In union with the Successor of Peter, the Bishops, who are successors of the Apostles, receive through the power of their episcopal ordination the authority to teach the revealed truth in the Church. They are teachers of the faith" (EN, 68).

This formulation highlights the teaching of Vatican II on the sacramentality of the episcopate.

1. It is by virtue of his ordination that the bishop proclaims the Gospel. "The holy synod teaches that the fullness of the sacrament of Orders is conferred by episcopal consecration (. . .) Now, episcopal consecration confers, together with the office of sanctifying, the duty also of teaching and ruling. . . ." (LG, 21). The office (*munus*) of teaching—which is also "the sure gift of truth"²—is therefore a consequence, an effect of the sacrament received, and is accompanied by corresponding sacramental graces.

2. It is in union with the Successor of Peter that he exercises this office. The conciliar text which I have just quoted continues, in fact, in the following way: "which (the duties of teaching and ruling), however, of their very nature can be exercised only in hierarchical communion with the head and members of the college." "Hierarchical communion" is a technical expression which occurs more than once in Vatican II. Its precise meaning was indicated in the *Nota praevia* added to *Lumen Gentium*. "*Communion* is an idea which was held in high honor by the ancient Church (as it is even today, especially in the East). It is understood, however, not of a certain vague feeling, but of an *organic reality* which demands a juridical form, and is simultaneously animated by charity" (NP, 2).

It is in the framework of hierarchical communion that a given diocese is assigned to a bishop, and it is also in accordance with the organic structure of this communion that this bishop will exercise his teaching office.

In this connection, let us recall that "in matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ, and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent of soul" (LG, 25). But this religious assent of will and intelligence presupposes that the bishop's teaching is carried out "in communion with the Roman Pontiff", in other words, within hierarchical communion and in accordance with its norm.

3. When it says that episcopal consecration confers the three tasks of sanctifying, teaching and governing, the Council speaks of three distinct but not separate tasks. It is a question, in fact, of three aspects of the one office of the pastor, the successor of the apostles. Each of these tasks presupposes the other two. As regards his teaching task, the bishop is not only the one who instructs but who leads; his word is not only truth, it is the way, it

marks out a path, for the bishop is the head of the flock which he governs in order to lead it to meet the Lord. His teaching is also sanctifying (the Council says deliberately that the bishop is a spiritual guide)³, through the specific dynamism of conversion and deepening of religious life, he gathers and constitutes the Christian community which reaches its culminating point in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist (cf. SC, 41)⁴.

4. Episcopal consecration confers "tasks" (*munera*), so it is not a question of mere capacities or mere qualifications. He who receives a task must carry it out. A bishop who has received the task of teaching cannot be silent. He must evangelize, he must tell and recall Christ's truth. Paul's words are applied to him too: "If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel." (I Cor. 9:16).

II

The Bishop and His Collaborators

Teacher of Doctrine and Promoter of Collaboration

It is particularly as teacher of doctrine (*doctrinae magister*) that the bishop presides in God's name and stead over the flock whose pastor he is (cf. LG, 20). A teacher of doctrine, the bishop is, therefore, a judge of faith. He exercises his office, in fact, not only by proclaiming the Gospel entrusted to the Church, but by identifying it and recognizing it.

Far from absorbing other charisms, the bishop supports them, promotes them and coordinates them. In a wholly evangelizing Church—and to the very extent to which evangelizing fervor develops in the diocese—the bishop will find not only among priests and deacons but also among religious men and women and in the laity, the multiform and specialized collaboration that he needs ⁵.

I know that you are particularly expecting me to deal with collaboration between the bishop and the theologian. Before that, however, it seems to me useful to recall two conditions of all collaboration in pastoral matters.

(1) Collaboration is greatly facilitated by dialogue. The latter was recommended by the Council to all those who make up the People of God (GS, 92), with a rightful part given to laymen especially when it is a question of seeking with them the best forms for their apostolate (cf. AA, 25). It is clear, however, that the bishop's dialogue with his priests has a privileged character when it is a question of the apostolate (cf. CD, 28). In fact those who have received priestly ordination participate with the bishop, although in a different degree, in the one priesthood and the one ministry of Christ. For that reason, the bishop will see in them "indispensable counsellors" (cf. PO, 7).

The dialogue is not in any way a dilution of authority or a trans-

fer of responsibility: it is up to the bishop to make decisions. But it makes it possible to use to the best advantage the contribution of each one to the common work. Furthermore, in an age of insecurity such as ours, in which the cultural upheaval may well bring about ill-considered initiatives in some people, it is calculated to ensure serenity, and to create a climate of pastoral trust, which is indispensable to live the mystery of the Church.

(2) Collaboration presupposes spiritual preparation. Docility of minds has its roots in the readiness of hearts. Collaboration in pastoral matters—and this holds good particularly in the doctrinal field—must be developed in an atmosphere of living faith, spirit of prayer and great humility. It will be up to the bishop to form spiritually those whom he associates most closely with his work, never forgetting that in him the pastor and the teacher of doctrine are inseparable from the master of spiritual life.

With the same humility the bishop will receive advice that he is given for a better exercise of his task, and he will continue to deepen his knowledge, especially in the doctrinal field; for the assistance that the Spirit grants him does not dispense him from having recourse to the usual means to distinguish true faith from that which is false. For the bishops as for everyone, "it is by examining the Scriptures, in the light of the whole of tradition, in full participation in the life of the whole body, with the prayer and crucifying asceticism that this calls for, that truth is discovered, even if it is true (. . .) that, having special responsibilities in this connection, they can also expect special graces." ⁶

The Bishop and the Theologian

After having recalled some conditions for any dialogue in the Church, we can tackle the examination of the ones which concern more particularly the relations between the bishop and the theologian. For these relations to be trustful, in spite of tensions, which are always possible, they will be based on a clear view of the respective roles and responsibilities. Without envisaging the question as a whole here, we would like to draw attention to certain aspects that are more relevant today.

Theology is a science. It is in particular the place and the instrument of a dialogue, at the scientific level, between the faith of the Church and the historical cultures in which this faith must be lived. Among the requirements of the scientific method, there is

that of a certain freedom of movement, with the possibility of putting forward new hypotheses of which some are good and others may be rash or even mistaken: that is a risk inherent in research. That is why the science of theology is addressed directly to the circles of those who collectively have the mission of causing this research to progress.

The bishop, charged with proclaiming the Gospel, addresses the whole community of believers to communicate to it the substance of the Christian message, that is, those spiritual treasures for which one can live and die, those essential truths the certainty of which goes beyond all the intellectual capacities of any man and are guaranteed by the authority of Jesus and that of the Church which He founded.

To proclaim the Gospel, the bishop will take into account the contribution of contemporary theologians, for the message of faith which he expresses is not unrelated to temporal matters but is addressed to men marked by a given historical situation and culture. The theologian, on his side, finds in the profession of faith of the Church the necessary point of reference of his scientific activity. A theologian is above all a believer. Without faith, the subject of his science escapes him. His research, therefore, needs to be confronted and kept in harmony with the heritage of faith which the episcopate preserves and hands down⁷. In this way it will be in conformity with the Gospel, "the source of all salutary truth and of all moral rules" (DS, 1501).

These overall views invite us to go into some more particular considerations. In the first place the bishop's relations with theologians will be inspired by gratitude. To justify the latter, without going very far back in the past, allow me to remind you of the work carried out by theologians during the Council, their contribution to the various interconfessional dialogues, the assistance they bring to episcopal conferences, the documents produced by the International Commission of Theology, the advice that consultants give the different Roman Congregations and particularly the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Theologians generally do all this over and above University work which is already demanding in itself.

Let us recognize also that the dialogue should not be an exceptional thing. If bishops and theologians acquire the habit of working together, collaboration will be more effective when an important

problem suddenly crops up. The trust created will make it possible to overcome obstacles more easily. This presupposes, of course, that theological work should be strongly stimulated and that there should be no hesitation over the investments necessary to form theologians in the best conditions possible.

I know that some bishops are afraid to open a dialogue with their theologians because they let themselves be impressed by their learning and also by a language that is sometimes esoteric. While hoping that the bishop's theological culture will be as broad and as up-to-date as possible and while noting that the best theologians are not the ones who are most difficult to understand, it should be remembered that it is in the name of the Church's Creed that the bishop will interpellate the theologian and that he will enter the dialogue in this capacity. It is a strong position, founded on rock.

Theologians, on their side, will take care not to identify their hypotheses with the faith of the Church. Furthermore, they will propose to the faithful only those that have first passed the test of a strict verification. Allow me to recall to you here the words of Paul VI to a group of bishops: "Respect for the Magisterium is a constituent element of theological methods. And also respect for the People of God: the latter has the right not to be upset inconsiderately by risky hypotheses or stands, which it is not competent to judge or which are likely to be simplified or manipulated by movements or opinion" ⁸.

It is also necessary to envisage a situation in which a theologian considers himself unable, for reasons which he deems certain, to give his assent to a teaching of the ordinary noninfallible magisterium. What is his duty then? In the first place he will not replace the magisterium by intervening directly among the Christian community; he can continue his research, using for that purpose all the resources of the scientific method characteristic of theology; if, after having made all the efforts necessary to understand the teaching of the magisterium and agree with it, his personal position remains unchanged, after making sure that his step is inspired by the desire to contribute to the good of the Church, he can intervene with the competent doctrinal authority to put forward his reasons.

A direct appeal to public opinion to contradict a clear teaching of the magisterium, using for this purpose the resources of the press and television, is an act that no theology can justify. The

theologians who, under different circumstances, have not hesitated to do so, have taken a fearful responsibility upon themselves. If so many minds are confused and so many consciences are perplexed in the Church today, it is partly owing to initiatives of this kind.

On his side, the bishop will never lose sight of his specific role and the norms imposed on him. The religious assent of intelligence and will (cf. LG, 25) that the faithful owe to the authentic teaching of their own bishop (teaching in Christ's name, in the area of faith and morals, in communion with the head of the Church), cannot be expected, far less demanded, for the free opinions that this same bishop would like to propose. This distinction must be made clearly. Furthermore, pastoral prudence requires that the bishop should be extremely discreet in the public expression of his personal options in order to avoid a confusion from which his authentic teaching, the proclamation of the Gospel of salvation, might suffer in consequence.

III

In Hierarchical Communion

The Supreme Pastor and His Roman Auxiliaries

The bishop exercises his office as preacher of the Gospel in the framework of the universal Church. We have already seen that hierarchical communion is the essential condition for the exercise of the task of teaching (LG, 21). This same hierarchical communion is the condition of membership of the episcopal college (LG, 22).

The successor of Peter is the principle and the perpetual and visible foundation (LG, 23) of this collegial unity, by virtue of *divine right*. Of course, in the concrete and daily exercise of this office, in a Church which has nearly 3,500 bishops and over 700 million faithful, the supreme pastor needs a certain number of collaborators and special institutions, about which it is only right that we should say a word here. It is through the Roman Curia, composed of Congregations, courts, offices and secretariats, that the Sovereign Pontiff habitually deals with the affairs of the universal Church (*Regimini Ecclesiae*, art. 1). These institutions, which clearly have *ecclesiastical law* status, are the present-day historical form of an assistance which the Head of the Church will always need. Their authority is that conferred on them by the one whom they serve. They are the development of the collaboration that the "presbyterium" ensured the bishop of Rome. L. Boyer describes their nature and operation as follows: "The cardinals who belong to them, even if they are only priests (or even mere deacons), receive from the Pope a power of decision that participates in his own for matters which concern more or less closely the unity of the Catholic Church, although their decisions are subject to his subsequent confirmation. Moreover these decisions are reached only after the matter has been examined by consultants, most of whom are simple priests, who are called, before small groups or at plenary sessions, in writing or orally, to give, motivate and discuss their opinions" ⁹.

Respect for the Particular Church

A bishop united with the Pope does not need to cross the boundaries of his diocese to put himself in the service of universal communion. Through the apostolic work which is specifically his, in his particular Church, by bringing new disciples to Christ, by preaching the faith, by causing its influence to spread, by picking out from the treasures of Revelation the old and the new, by eliminating errors which threaten the flock (LG, 25), the bishop takes his place in the "ordinary magisterium of the whole Church scattered over the earth"¹⁰. He puts at the disposal of his people the heritage of the universal Church, but he also causes it to fructify since he proposes the Christian doctrine, while meeting the difficulties and the questions of the people entrusted to him, and sheds light in this way on the different virtualities of the Gospel.

Successors of the apostles, the bishops, set up by the Holy Spirit, feed and govern the flock entrusted to each of them as true pastors. The first Vatican Council, recalling how much "this power is affirmed, strengthened and defended by the supreme and universal pastor", opportunistically quotes a fine passage from St. Gregory the Great: "My honor is the honor of the universal Church. My honor is the solid strength of my brothers. When everyone is paid the honor due to him, then I am honored". (DS, 3061).

Personally, I believe that the Holy See takes care to make its practice conform with these great guidelines. To speak only of the organism I know best, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, it intervenes only where the action of the local bishop is impossible; or when the problem has taken on an extension that goes beyond the limits of a diocese, often reaching international dimensions (think, for example, of the books translated simultaneously into several languages); or else at the request of a bishop who, owing to the circumstances, needs to be supported by a higher authority. In any case, collaboration with the bishops (and the episcopal conferences) belongs to the ordinary methods of the Congregation. It often refers to a local authority a question that has been laid before it directly. In the case that the Congregation alone is able to act, it takes care as far as possible to consult the bishops more especially concerned. Certainly, the Congregation, by virtue of its constitution, has the right to intervene always and

everywhere, but why should it do so when, in a local situation, the local pastor can act effectively?

The Synod. The Visit "ad limina"

Relations between the bishops and the Holy See take on different forms. In addition to the ordinary correspondence and other forms of personal contacts, mention should be made of the visit "ad limina" according to which every bishop is bound to go to Rome at set dates to venerate the tombs of the apostles and to report to the Sovereign Pontiff the situation of the diocese entrusted to him (cf. *Ad Romanam Ecclesiam*, 29.6.1975). Paul VI—whose example was followed by John Paul I during his too short pontificate—gave great importance to the visit "ad limina" which was often for him an occasion for precise pastoral interventions.

A privileged form of these relations with Rome is constituted by the Synod. By means of this, bishops chosen in the different regions of the world carry out a mission of information and advice to the Supreme Pastor, with the purpose of facilitating a closer collaboration and a concordance of views on the essential points of doctrine and on the modalities of the life of the Church (cf. *Apostolica sollicitudo*, 15.9.1965).

The Doctrinal Documents

The various documents emanating from the Holy See also contribute to universal communion. Some are directly acts of the Holy Father, others come from the departments of the Roman Curia. Some are doctrinal in character; others belong to the field of discipline; others again are mixed, such as, for example, liturgical documents which concern both doctrine and discipline.

What attitude should be assumed with regard to these documents? That will depend each time on the nature of the authority of the document in question. Disciplinary documents which formulate precepts appeal to our obedience. It is worth noting, however, that not all the documents necessarily involve *new* regulations. Thus the recent text on "Relations between bishops and religious" (*Mutuae relationes*, 14.5.1978), published jointly by the two competent Congregations, bears the characteristic title of "Directives". It presupposes the juridical regulations already applied and does not depart in any way from previous documents.

For the subject with which we are dealing, the preaching of the Gospel, it is the doctrinal documents that concern us in the first place. In this connection, it is important to recall that the authority of the ecclesiastical magisterium is involved in different degrees in the acts emanating from it. It is always necessary to study the intentions of the authority which expresses itself. Sometimes the latter teaches formally (in an infallible way, or merely authentically); and sometimes it directs, recommends, recalls, informs, explains. In view of the necessary correspondence between the authority of the Magisterium and the docility expected of the faithful, there will therefore be different degrees also in the adherence of the latter.

I would like to speak to you here of the doctrinal documents emanating from the Roman Congregations, for it is a subject with which authors deal little, and which is consequently less well known. When one speaks of doctrinal documents of the Congregations, it is generally a question of those of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. By virtue of its constitution, this Congregation has the task of promoting and protecting the doctrine of the faith and of morals.

What is the authority of these documents and what adherence do they postulate? Their authority comes 1) from the fact that they emanate from the Congregation of Cardinals charged with safeguarding the doctrine of faith and of morals, upon which the Holy Father confers a power that participates in his own; 2) from the Pope's explicit approval (*in forma communi*). Thus confirmed, these documents remain acts of the Congregation, but they have access to the levels of the ordinary magisterium¹¹. The Pope, in fact exercises his ordinary magisterium not only by himself, but also, when he considers it opportune, through his auxiliaries in ecclesiastical law, the Congregations, and in the first place the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. It follows that the *doctrinal decisions*¹² of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith postulate the internal and religious assent which is due to the acts of the ordinary non-infallible magisterium.¹³

This calls for the following remarks:

1. In a doctrinal document, not everything is a *doctrinal decision*. The latter is generally surrounded by various considerations of an explanatory or documentary nature which do not claim the

same assent¹⁴. An attentive effort of analysis is therefore necessary to pick out the doctrinal decision properly speaking.

2. A doctrinal decision of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith may be concerned with recalling authoritatively a teaching of the infallible magisterium of the Church. Care must therefore be taken to distinguish between the form (a magisterial document of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith which, while it comes under the ordinary magisterium, is not guaranteed by infallibility), and the content (which may be a dogma of faith). Thus, for example, on February 21, 1972, the Congregation published the declaration *Mysterium Filii Dei* to recall and safeguard these principal truths of Revelation which are the mysteries of Incarnation and Holy Trinity. The adherence due to these dogmas goes far beyond the assent which is required for documents of the ordinary non-infallible magisterium. It is a question simply of the "divine Catholic faith" (DS, 3011).

The Episcopal Conferences

In the course of this talk I have not dealt with the Episcopal Conferences. Although the subject is worthy of being treated in itself, I do not think that it is indispensable to tackle it here. The episcopal conferences were set up to enable bishops to achieve closer harmony and more coordinated action in carrying out their task, and they render unquestionable services in this field (cf. CD, 37). By *themselves*, however, they do not exercise any magisterium. Certainly, in well-defined cases of a pastoral nature, a two-thirds majority can be juridically binding on the members of a conference as a whole, and consequently force the minority to fall in with the opinion of the majority. But it should be noted that it is a question every time of cases prescribed by common law (which always comes under the supreme power), or of special cases dealt with following upon a mandate from the Apostolic See, which has also the task of "recognizing" all decisions reached (cf. CD 38,4). Therefore there is no intermediary of divine right between the head of the particular Church and the supreme authority.

But this reminder of the bishop's specific status in his diocese (cf. Can. 329) is not an invitation to insularity. On the contrary the collegial spirit (*affectus collegialis*), which has its roots in the very nature of the episcopate, leads to exchanges and collaboration with other dioceses, particularly within the Episcopal Con-

ference (LG, 23). As regards the ministry of the Word of God, the Conference can offer very important services. Just think of the doctrinal commissions intended to promote sound theological work and to carry out the part of watching over writings. In the latter field, it is perhaps useful to recall that "the episcopal conference can draw up a list of censors, outstanding for their knowledge, their prudence and the soundness of their doctrine, who are at the disposal of episcopal curias; or can set up a commission of censors whom the local bishops can consult"¹⁵. Acting in this way, the conference offers a specialized service, without, however, imposing a limitation on the initiative of the local bishop.

The Doctrinal Explanation of Pastoral Decisions

I do not need to enumerate the means at the disposal of a bishop today to proclaim the Christian doctrine, or above all to stress the decisive importance of catechetical teaching. Moreover the bishops present here know better than I do the possibilities offered by the various media of social communication nowadays.

I would like, however, to draw attention further to one point. At present, more than in the past, bishops should always be available to give doctrinal explanations about their pastoral decisions. Let me quote to you here some characteristic words of Paul VI: "As a result of the progress of human culture, the importance of which for religion must not be neglected, the faithful follow the directives of the Church more fully and more lovingly if they see clearly the *raison d'être* of definitions and laws, at least as far as that is possible in matters of faith and morals"¹⁶.

Let us take for example the application in our dioceses of the Holy See norms on eucharistic hospitality or on general absolution. It is not sufficient to watch over the faithful application of these rules; it is also necessary to shed light on the doctrine of which they are the pastoral expression. It must be shown that beyond the norms on the admission of other Christians to eucharistic communion in the Catholic Church¹⁷ (which is incorrectly called "intercommunion"), there is the teaching of our faith on the essential relations that exist between the Church and eucharistic celebration; and that the rules concerning collective absolution¹⁸ have the aim of safeguarding concretely the specific function of the Sacrament of Penance, as exercise of the power of the keys. In fact, unlike baptism which effects justification by way of ablution,

the Sacrament of Penance remits sins in the form of a judgment. To pass judgment, a knowledge of the facts is necessary which only a precise and complete confession can furnish. Consequently the custom of collective absolution, except for cases of physical or moral impossibility, is not only a serious abuse, but an action that is directly opposed to the nature of the sacrament.

This readiness to answer the questions of our faithful, calls for a personal preparation that is continually maintained and brought up to date. Where this preparation is lacking, the action of bishops becomes timid, too reserved, and runs the risk of letting important pastoral opportunities slip by. In connection with new forms of spiritual life, among which "charismatic renewal" draws attention more particularly, allow me to recall the recommendation made to bishops by Paul VI on several occasions: they cannot stand aside, waiting and seeing. "The spiritual life of the faithful depends on the active pastoral responsibility of each bishop in his own diocese"¹⁹. It is up to them to "test all things and hold fast to that which is good" (LG, 12). This work of discernment in spiritual matters presupposes, of course, a solid doctrinal background. The bishop cannot assume these functions unless he is a "teacher of doctrine" *in himself*. The collaborators to whom he must appeal to support him, can never take his place. Speaking of the task of preaching the Gospel, the Council of Trent decreed that it must be assumed personally (*per se ipsos*) by the bishop.

I would like to end with a comparison. Whom do we put at the head of our universities? Usually a well-known professor, who has gained experience and prestige in the field of teaching. But this is not always the case. Sometimes we find there a politician, an administrator, a banker, or even a general. Why? Because under certain circumstances, questions of a practical nature come to the foreground: it is necessary to improve a financial situation, to proceed with important constructions, to redistribute the personnel more rationally, to coordinate different services, etc. . . . In a word, it is necessary to organize. Organization becomes a priority aim, and a great organizer is called in, who can always obtain the help of others for questions concerning teaching.

Can it be the same in a diocese? I answer no. Whatever the circumstances may be organization can never override the primary and permanent task of evangelization. All others are subordinated to this principal aim, including organization, the importance of

which, nevertheless, must be admitted. Always and everywhere the preaching of the Gospel will be imposed on the bishop, not only as a personal duty, but as the first of his duties. The latter, however, far from being a burden, is for him the source of his joy and gives balance to his existence. In fact the Gospel which he preaches to others, unifies his prayer, his study and his work; it also gives his personal life its deep meaning. The bishop is therefore a happy man.

NOTES

¹ Cf. G. Philips, *l'Eglise et son mystere au II^e Concile du Vatican*, t.I, Paris, 1967, p.170.

² "Charisma veritatis certum" is the expression of St. Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.*, IV, XXVI, 2), which is taken up again in the Constitution *Dei Verbum* (8): "From the preaching of those who have received, along with their right of succession in the episcopate, the sure charism of truth".

³ The bishops "lead others to perfection" (CD, 15). The Council uses here the classical expression *perfectores*, of Dionysian origin.

⁴ The instruction of the Sacred Congregation of Rites *Eucharisticum mysterium* (25.5.67) takes up this conciliar text again, explaining it a little: "In the eucharistic celebration, presided over by the bishop surrounded by his presbyterium and his ministers, in the midst of the active participation of the whole People of God, is the principal manifestation of the Church, hierarchically constituted" (42).

⁵ It will always be to the advantage of bishops to re-read the *Directorum de pastorali ministerio episcoporum*, published by the Congregation of Bishops, in 1973.

⁶ L. Boyer, *l'Eglise du Christ*, Paris, 1970, p. 441.

⁷ In what precedes, we take up again some formulations of an interview given by Cardinal J. Ratzinger on the Vatican Radio on 1 July 1977.

⁸ On 20 June 1977, to the French Bishops of the Centre-East (region of Lyon), on their visit "ad limina". Furthermore, when the Pope takes a stand on a point with the manifest desire to settle a question that has been much debated up to then, it is clear that the latter is no longer a matter of free discussion for theologians. Such is the teaching of Pius XII, in the encyclical *Humani generis* (12.8.1950) (cf. DS, 3885).

⁹ L. Boyer, *op. cit.*, p. 549.

¹⁰ cf. Pius IX, *Tuas libenter*, letter to the Archbishop of Munich, on 21.12.1863; DS 2879.

¹¹ Since 1972, the Congregation has published among other things *Declaration on Christology* (1972), on the Church (1973), on abortion (1974), on certain questions concerning sexual ethics (1975), on the question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood (1976), and *pastoral Norms on collective absolution* (1972).

¹² I take up again here the vocabulary of Pius IX: ". . . opus esse, ut se subiciant *decisionibus*, quae *ad doctrinam pertinentes* a Pontificiis Congregationibus proferuntur" (see preceding quotation; DS 2880).

¹³ An organism of ecclesiastical law cannot, of course, participate in the prerogative of infallibility.

¹⁴ The distinction between "the norm of the Church which is imposed on everyone and "theological reflection" which manifests just a "deep fitness" without constituting "a demonstrative argumentation", is clearly expressed in *Inter insigniores*, 5 (*Declaration on the question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood*).

¹⁵ *Ecclesiae pastorum*, art. 6 (*Decree of the Congregation for the Faith with regard to the vigilance of the pastors of the Church over books*, 19.3.1975).

¹⁶ Preamble of the *Motu Proprio Integrae servandae* of 7.12.1965 in which the Congregation of the Holy Office is given a new name and new regulations (becoming the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith).

¹⁷ *Instruction of the Secretariat for the Unity of Christians* (29.6.1972).

¹⁸ *Pastoral Norms* (see above note 11).

¹⁹ Words spoken on 10.10.1973 in the course of an address to the members of a Congress of charismatic groups which had met at Grottaferrata. (See also the address delivered on 19.5.1975 to the international Congress of charismatic renewal, which met in Rome on the occasion of the Holy Year.

Theology and the Human Sciences; Theology and Contemplation

Address to Catholic University Faculty
November 13, 1978

You have asked me to prepare a "presentation" for this meeting. You expect me, if I understand you correctly, to propose to you some points for our common reflection. I think, however, that it is useful to precede the presentation of the subjects with a brief presentation of the speaker.

Most of my life has been dedicated to the teaching of theology. From 1944 to 1962 (with a short interruption for the preparation of my thesis for the doctorate) I taught dogmatic theology in Belgium and in France, full time and as my only and exclusive occupation. From 1962 to 1966, I continued to teach, but part time, for I was at the same time General Secretary of Studies in the Dominican Order to which I belong, and an expert at the Council. Since 1966, that is for the last 12 years, I have been a member of the Roman Curia: first in the Secretariat for the Unity of Christians and today in the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Certainly, my present work no longer permits me to teach, but it keeps me in contact with theological work, in which my interest has not diminished.

No longer having to teach theology daily, I can perhaps view things in better perspective in order to discern where the essential problems arise and what are the great tasks that await those who can dedicate themselves to research today.

Having to limit myself, I propose to you two questions only, regretting not to be able to tackle more: I. Must theology today be contemplative? II. What service can the human sciences render theology?

I. Must theology today be contemplative?

If F.S. Schmitt's chronology is exact, we are perhaps celebrating in this year the ninth centenary of St. Anselm's "*Proslogion*"¹.

As you know, this work, together with another that follows it, was published by St. Anselm under the title *Fides quaerens intellectum* (Faith seeking understanding). This title is the whole program of St. Anselm. Actually, the formula has had a great success and has been taken up again by most theologians.

I wonder, however, if this easy agreement on a formula does not conceal very different positions, some of which are far from being in harmony with St. Anselm's thought. For the monk of Bec, it is not a question of just any understanding of revealed data but of an intellectual perception which lies *inter fidem et speciem* (between faith and the beatific vision). Note the boldness of the statement and the contemplative orientation he gives to the whole theological effort.

But let us reread this expression in its own context. It is found in Anselm's letter to Pope Urban II (1098); "Since I conceive the understanding which we enjoy in this life as a middle term between faith (*fidem*) and the beatific vision (*speciem*), I am of the opinion that the more one progresses in this understanding, the nearer one draws to the beatific vision to which we all aspire" ². Not only, therefore, is the theologian's rational research set *inter fidem et speciem*, but it is movement towards the beatific vision.

Let me now ask you the question: Do you have the impression that this orientation is always perceived as a necessity today? And yet it corresponds well to the very nature of theology, which is the science of Revelation.

Revelation, the primordial mystery which communicates all the others to us, a manifestation of the plan of salvation conceived by God from time immemorial and realized in Jesus Christ, is an event, a divine initiative, a free and sovereign act, on which man by himself cannot count and which he cannot foresee. This intervention of God has a new and unforeseen character which goes beyond the expectation of men.

If this is so, must not the theologian always have his eyes fixed on this unveiling of God's mystery which Revelation is, on this "self-manifestation of God in loving confidence" ³. Is this look not the very look of contemplation, in which understanding and worship are inseparable?

Here there intervenes the mediation of the magisterium, on which it falls to communicate what has been revealed to the be-

lieving community, to guarantee its authenticity and protect it from all contamination. Without this intervention of the teaching authority of the Church—which is nothing but the faithful and uninterrupted preaching of Christ's Gospel—a contemplative theology, a theology which has the ambition to set itself *inter fidem et speciem*, would be inconceivable.

Divergent movements of thought oppose this contemplative orientation of theology today. I would like to mention two:

— certain anthropological approaches which confer on man a role that is not his in the plan of God, creator and redeemer;

— certain theories and programs which, in the Christian message, give primacy to social and political commitment.

1. Tackling the first movement of thought, I wish to stress the adjective "certain"; for what compromises the true proceedings of theology is *not interest in man, but a certain disproportion*, an excess which makes man an idol, a kind of pseudo-absolute, whereas his whole dignity consists in the place, at once eminent and relative, that he occupies in the mystery of creation and redemption.

Interest in man is indispensable for theology:

a) It was for us men, and for our salvation, that the Word became flesh. *The salvation of men is not a secondary effect, a "by-product" of a wider and more ambitious divine plan.* This question has caused theologians to reflect a great deal. The most varied theses have been put forward, but in the end we come back to the essential fact of revelation. The Son of Man came to look for and save what was lost (cf Lk 19:10). Man is thus the beneficiary of Incarnation. I wonder if we have reflected sufficiently on this essential affirmation of our faith.

b) The human person, by his very nature, is not a being enclosed, shut up in his own universe, but on the contrary is open to everything that exists; *his intelligence and his will are made for unlimited truth and good.* In this way, the mystery of infinite God (with his plan of salvation) corresponds to this *receptivity* that the Creator has conferred on his human creature. This aptitude, certainly, is not a demand, for man cannot assert any right; but it is capacity. So that when God carries out his plan of saving men in Jesus Christ, by giving them a share in those divine treasures

which totally transcend the understanding of the human mind (cf DV, 6), He *does not destroy* human nature, as when a small, decrepit building is pulled down to replace it with another larger and more modern one; nor does He add something extra, as when the height of a house is raised by building a new storey. No, through the work of salvation and the communication of Himself, *God comes to fulfill man*. And only God is capable of doing so.

When we speak of intellectual movements which estrange the Christian thinker from contemplation, it is not, therefore, a question of those who show an interest in man such as he appears in the mystery of creation and redemption, but of those who isolate man, shut him up in himself and confer on him a kind of self-sufficiency. For these intellectual movements, which may be very different from one another, man no longer just occupies his place in the plan of salvation, but becomes its judge; he is no longer the one who docilely accepts the revelation which is communicated and which operates; he becomes its criterion and measure.

We have various expressions in history of this anthropological option. For *Spinoza* (1632-1677), who speaks in the name of man's rationality, the content of "revealed" religion is rational, but its form is absolutely irrational. The latter merely represents, symbolically and in a way adapted to popular mentality, the philosophical truths about God and man, the content of which is, in the last resort, moral and practical.

For the *modernist movement* at the beginning of this century, it is human interiority which is determinant. The whole of Christianity is rethought exclusively according to this criterion. Both among liberal Protestants and among Catholic modernists, the concern to free religious knowledge from any relationship with speculative reason, is met with. For *Auguste Sabatier*, the Christian can accept as true only what he feels is true. For *Alfred Loisy*, the Bible is only the collection of the experiences of the Old Testament believer and of the first Christians, the Church having no other role than to express these individual experiences.

The mentality of modern man, as conceived by *Rudolf Bultmann*, is the anthropological criterion with which the famous Protestant exegete, who died two years ago, operates. The biblical themes of the pre-existence of Christ, the Incarnation, the redeeming death, the resurrection of Jesus, his ascension and his return at the end of time, are part of a vision of the world which is

absolutely unacceptable for modern man, for whom it is impossible to adopt, by an act of will, an outworn conception of reality as a whole.

According to Catholic theology, it is—as we said—through the mediation of the Church that man comes into contact with revelation as the sovereign and free act of God. Consequently, where reference to the magisterium is reduced or is lacking, the anthropological argumentation (of various origins) asserts itself, preponderant, encroaching, irresistible. The consequences are immediately apparent in the theology of Christ, justification and grace, in Christian ethics, in catechesis, in spirituality, in the liturgy and in apostolic methods. . . .

To conclude our reflections on this point, we could perhaps say that where the anthropological consideration takes precedence over the supremacy of revelation, we witness a curious reversal: *man is no longer in the image of God, but it is God who is conceived in the image of man.* Thus we find ourselves in the presence of a new and paradoxical form of anthropomorphism.

2. The *second anti-contemplative movement of thought*, based on the preeminence of action, is fundamentally only a variant of the one we have just described. It is a *new way of conforming to the requirements of certain ideological elements of contemporary culture.* For this movement, *efficacy* comes first: *theology will be finalized by “praxis”*; it will give primacy to commitment; its main interest will concern social structures and political institutions, leaving problems of private morality in the background. It will be clearly distinguished from classical theology, which has the defect, in its eyes, of not having a stance or being committed.

It is, of course, up to those who promote this theology to justify such a position, and particularly this “praxis” to which they constantly refer. Is “praxis” to be accepted as a postulate, or does it admit of analysis, criticisms and perhaps rectification? Is it unique? If, on the contrary, it presents itself in different forms and with different orientations, what will be the criterion which will make choice possible?

If I formulate these questions, it is to show how these theologies of social and political action impose on themselves an impossible task by giving preference to commitment rather than thought. In

this way they easily become the prey of fashionable ideologies, when they are not their direct emanation.

The error consists in opposing contemplation and efficacy. Personally, for me there is no efficacy except the one that comes from contemplation. With our eyes fixed on God, we are able to become acquainted with the plan of salvation realized in Jesus Christ. This divine plan is not a mere enriching of intelligence, it is action. God who becomes incarnate, the foundation of the Church and her apostolate, the announcement of the Kingdom, already mysteriously present, but which will receive from God its completion at the end of time: all that is action. This action, however, is not exhausted in itself. It brings us back incessantly and finally to contemplation: "We know we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2).

Before the unveiling of the mystery of salvation, the Christian is not a spectator but an actor. We are aware that we know God if we keep his commandments. That is the test of authenticity according to St John (1 Jn 2:3). Already at the origins of Christianity there loomed up the danger of an escape into gratuitous religious speculations. Hence the insistent reminder: faith must inform the whole of existence. This warning constitutes the Christian message.

In the framework of contemplative theology, the main requirement of the theologians of "praxis" can be fully honored; the struggle against social and political injustices is not extraneous to the plan of salvation. The Christian cannot tolerate man being kept in conditions incompatible with his dignity. But it is only in this framework that the imperious duty of helping men and reforming institutions will find its precise place, and its justification, with the indication of the ways which make it possible not to get lost.

II. What service can the human sciences render to theology?

When people speak today of the human sciences in their relationship with faith, they are generally referring to the following disciplines: psychology (including psychoanalysis), sociology, ethnology and the science of religions. Some of them are not just theoretical but also practical, partaking of the nature of science and art at the same time. In the past these disciplines were often studied by thinkers alien to faith, so that certain versions of them have been integrated into an atheistic view of the world and of

existence. In the last few decades these sciences have developed prodigiously and draw general attention, kept alive by the media of social communication.

What will be the attitude of the theologian to these disciplines? It must, it seems to me, be both positive and critical.

It will be positive, because these disciplines "offer theology, each in its own way, important *aid* to get to know man better (. . .) and at the same time they are a *stimulus* to determine more perfectly the meaning of the revealed truths which refer to man" ⁴. Everything that concerns man interests the theologian, for the science of revelation, like revelation itself, is for the good of men.

It will be critical, for theology can take from them only results that have been scientifically verified, taking into account, however, the degree of certainty peculiar to each of them. I understand "critical", of course, not in the sense of an unfavorable judgment but in that of a close examination of value, of a correct appreciation of qualities.

Let us take up again each of these points. 1. *The human sciences help us to get to know man better*. That does not mean, however, that they constitute, in themselves, knowledge of human nature. In fact these sciences are all sciences of observation which grasp man in a determined and limited context. They are, therefore, strictly speaking, sciences of human *behavior*. To serve knowledge of human *nature*, they need the mediation of philosophy which, alone, makes it possible to define permanent values in the eyes of reason.

2. *The human sciences are a stimulus*. The expression is an opportune one for it sheds light on the type of relationship which must be established between these disciplines and theology. It is a question, in fact, of distinct fields and different objects with, consequently, methods of their own. Relations will be based on dialogue. Theology will let itself be questioned by the human sciences, but it will give its answers in the light of the Word of God. This questioning will be precious for it will lead theology to react in an autonomous way, considering new aspects of the human problem and shedding light on new virtualities of the mystery of salvation.

3. *These sciences call for a careful critical examination*. In the first place because they constitute a field in which philosophi-

cal premises and, in general, socio-cultural conditions play an important role. Furthermore, because certain specialists in these matters *tend to forget the frontiers of their own discipline*, and to generalize their conclusions too easily, losing sight of the other sciences which deal with man. The sociologist for whom the whole of reality is sociology, and the psychologist for whom everything can be explained by psychoanalysis, are not rare beings. Finally, because these human sciences, if they are in full development, are also in full research; their conclusions, of course, feel the effects. It is often the sociologists themselves who warn theologians against an infatuation which is not justified.

What is to be done? The task is a complex one. Is the theologian capable of dealing with it alone? Will he become in turn a sociologist, psychologist, ethnologist, and historian of religions? Of course not. *It is here that the dialogue recommended by Vatican II is necessary*: "Through a sharing of resources and points of view, let those who teach in seminaries, colleges and universities try to collaborate with men well versed in the other sciences" (GS, 62:7). There is a great deal to be done to bring about this collaboration.

This dialogue is at once demanding and difficult. The Council reminds us: "Although the Church has contributed much to the development of culture, experience shows that, because of circumstances, it is sometimes difficult to harmonize culture with Christian teaching" (GS, 62:1).

This is not an invitation to resignation or to compromise. Our convictions of faith tell us that we must try to overcome disagreements, with patience, certainly, but also with tenacity. "*Although faith is above reason, there can never be a real disagreement between them. Since the same God who reveals the mysteries and communicates faith, has made the light of reason descend into the human mind, God could not deny himself nor could truth ever contradict truth*"⁵. This teaching of the first Vatican Council ensures the Catholic theologian a dynamism animated by a hope.

The object of my second question was the human sciences. However we have seen clearly that a correct consideration of these disciplines in themselves and of the service they can render theology, calls for an intervention of philosophy at every moment. Such is the paradox of the present situation. These human sci-

ences which seem, in the eyes of some people, able to replace philosophy, owing to their mere existence and to the interest they arouse, appeal incessantly to specifically philosophical reflection. That is a point which also claims our attention.

* * *

Such are the two questions that I wanted to put before you. They show clearly, it seems to me, the prime importance of questions of method in theology and also the necessity of a personal commitment of the theologian which concerns his whole existence.

Thank you for your attention.

NOTES

¹ Cf. the introduction on St Anselm, his time and his work, given by R. Roques in his excellent edition of *Cur Deus homo* (Anselme de Cantorbéry, *Pourquoi Dieu s'est fait homme*. Sources chrétiennes, 91, Paris, 1963). The chronology is to be found on pp. 43-44.

² The letter to Urban II will be found in the above-mentioned volume, pp. 194-197 (PL, 158, p. 261 A).

³ R. Latourelle, *Theologie de la révélation*, 3^e édition, Paris, 1969, pp. 9-10.

⁴ S.C. for Catholic education, *La formation théologique des futurs prêtres*, Rome, 1976, p. 24.

⁵ *Constitutio dogmatica "Dei Filius" de fide catholica*, Cap. 4 (DS, 3017). (Sept., 1978)

