

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

It has been an idea of the Board of Directors that at the annual convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America in place of the report submitted by the President at the opening meeting there should be a brief Presidential address. The theme is to be, generally, a summary of the theological progress of the year, or a period of time, or recent theological development and trends, a kind of general conspectus of the field. It is in this direction that I shall attempt tonight to make a beginning, and though the effort be feeble and the result but superficial, it may, under the Holy Spirit, lead others in succeeding years to more profound and enlightening achievements.

With alacrity I have followed the suggestion to attempt to present a study of the theological content of the utterances of our happily reigning Pontiff, Pope Pius XII, to determine, if possible, what dogmas, what precepts His Holiness has emphasized and developed and to answer the question as to the extent of this influence on theological thought and study and perhaps evaluate the contribution that the discussions of theologians have made to these pronouncements of the Vicar of Christ.

Let me first speak of a few impressions that were made upon me in my study of the documents.

The first was my amazement at the multitude of the utterances of our Holy Father and their universal range. I discovered that a bibliographical volume, *Guide to the Documents of Pius XII*,¹ merely listing the titles and places of printing and comment, covering a period of ten years, ran to a two column volume of 206 pages (excluding indices, etc.). In one year which I chose at random, 1948, there are 167 titles. Naturally I was bewildered at this wealth of material. And I found that His Holiness had touched on nearly every phase of life. There are letters, speeches, allocutions, addressed to physicians, farmers, midwives, legislators, parents, Catholic Actionists, newlyweds, atomic scientists, seminarians. And while the

¹ *Guide to the Documents of Pius XII*, Sister M. Claudia, I.H.M., Newman Press, 1951.

audiences are drawn from all humanity itself, the topics are of the same wide diversity of instruction, exhortation and direction.

In this the world's premier theologian demonstrates that theology touches life in all its aspects and at every turn, and on its part is influenced by the surge of life in the age in its speculations. It has been said that theologians live in an ivory tower. The Holy Father's is not ivory: it is perhaps of steel. But it is a tower from which he looks into the world and enjoys a view that is far flung and yet distinct, intimate and penetrating: it embraces the events and tendencies of continents and nations, but also of families and individuals. Brought to mind is the second purpose of this our Society, "to relate theological science to current problems." Reading Pope Pius XII one realizes how he has done that, and repeatedly shown us that theology is not aloof. He is at one with the times. He rides with them, but with a firm guiding hand governed by a mind that sees the difference between understanding and appeasement. He does not withdraw and throw up his hands in despair. He makes a necessary adjustment and at the same time draws back toward the traditional. He does not deal with imaginary problems.

A second impression was that every application to life is based upon a truth. Never is advice or guidance or direction or precept left without its doctrinal foundation. Nothing that is practical is left floating in the air. Nor is it given for its own sake. There is a reason for it. And here our Holy Father underlines the fact that theology, speculation if you will, is the key to all practicality. He shows that theology, as the queen of the sciences, holds the ultimate solution of all problems. He becomes very specific, as we shall see, and demonstrates why that should be so, in its preoccupation with Eternal Truth and in its assurance of strength and certainty in the source of its enlightenment, Divine Revelation, and in its protection in the inerrancy of the guidance of the Church.

When I began my analysis it was my purpose to divide the documents, or parts of them, into dogma and moral. In my fancy there was in vision a very neat synopsis of each document, showing, let us say, two theses in dogma and three principles in moral, or proving that one document was doctrinal in content, another moral. But I found that it could not be done so easily: my attempt failed because

both seemed to be so interwoven and so interdependent that I just could not put parts of a document in a neat little box. In one sentence I would find the dogmatic and the moral blended. I found myself asking the question whether this was an exemplification of the fact that there are not two kinds of theology, or three or four: there is just one theology. Applications and approaches will differ as different ends temporarily demand, and it is very convenient, particularly for the classroom, to make a useable partition of matter.

We are all aware that Suarez designated man as the proximate end of moral theology the while he argued that there is no contradiction between that and making God the object of all theology. His words must be understood in the light of the passage of St. Thomas on which he was commenting. But if this or like statements have tended to dim the oneness of theology Pope Pius by his words and manner brings us back to the appreciation of the totality of the sacred science. He recalls from St. Thomas that everything is united in theology "sub ratione Dei" whether it be a tract on God Himself or a treatment of that which has an ordination to God as the "principium vel finem."² Theology embraces not only God in His essence, but flowing from that, in His actions and the guidance by which His creatures, the result of His actions, are led back to Him, their supernatural end. "After we have spoken of the pattern . . . we must turn our attention to His image, that is, man."³ All this is included in theology because it is all the object of Divine revelation and also because God is the principal object: it is communicating the knowledge of God as He is in Himself and also as the beginning and end of all things, especially rational creatures.⁴ The method of our Holy Father brings us back to the saying—"Theologia Deum docet, a Deo docetur, ad Deum ducit." He is exemplifying unity—the unity of theology.

I have wondered also whether this same feature of our Pope's words and writings does not thus bear witness to tradition as a source of revelation, the magisterium of the Church guarding, exemplifying and in a sense, by application, extending. Does the content of that

² *Summa Theologica*, I, q. I, art. 7.

³ Proem. I, II.

⁴ Proem. I, q. II.

section of theology known as moral theology give us a clearer concept of tradition and the teaching office of the Church?

You will cover pages of moral theology textbooks and see scant reference to the Scriptures. What then is the source of much of its teaching? The Church. When Pope Pius IX said that searchers after truth ". . . are obliged to submit to the decisions of the Papal Congregations as well as to those teachings which are by the constant and universal consent of Catholics so held as theological truths and certain conclusions that the opposite opinion, even when not heretical, still deserves some theological censure" he was underlining the universal teaching of Catholic schools as a source of theological doctrines. These are channels by which Catholic doctrines on faith and morals must be transmitted without error and they have therefore the nature of a source. From their unanimity follows naturally the conviction of the universal Church. But since it is a dogmatic principle that the whole Church cannot err in matters of faith and morals the consent of Catholic schools must offer a guarantee of inerrancy in these questions.

You see this in the writings of Pius. Not that every pronouncement is infallible or to be regarded as a revelation, but it is unequivocally stated in *Humani Generis* that while in writing encyclicals ". . . the Popes do not exercise their teaching power to the full, such statements come under the day-to-day teaching of the Church . . . and the positions advanced, the duties inculcated . . . are already bound up . . . with the general body of Catholic teaching."

I have spoken of this feature at some length (in proportion to the entire length of this address) because it will be heard as a recurring refrain in any further and more comprehensive study of the utterances of Pope Pius XII.

And thus, after a rather disproportionately long proemium I address myself to the question "What doctrines has our Holy Father delineated during the blessed years of his pontificate? Is it at all possible in such a variety of circumstances, among a multitude of interests, in such a diversity of audience to describe any teachings as leading or dominant?" I could wish that my study were more exhaustive and deeper and more intelligent. If it were I might not be

so bold as to say that I have discovered, not dominant thoughts, but I think a dominant doctrine around which cluster tenet and precept.

How shall I phrase it? The first word that comes to my mind is "unity," but that is quickly followed by "Church." Perhaps if we put them together we will come up with something like this: "A unity that is achieved and can be achieved only by the Church, through the Church and in the Church"; or again "The Church—the Church as unifying influence binding man to God and to his fellow men."

If we take what I shall call his "big" encyclicals we may come to regard them as one, issued in four installments and basically about the same thing, the Church. They can all be summed up thus: the Mystical Body is the Church; it prays and acts; its leadership is the priesthood; it teaches. In *Mystici Corporis* he defines and explains the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ; in *Mediator Dei* he shows us the Church praying and acting; in *Menti Nostrae* he turns to priests, leaders in the Church; in *Humani Generis* it is the Church as teacher that receives attention.

There is a unity that is founded on force. But it is not a true unity because not of the soul, not of the integral man, and not with God. Against this there is a unity of charity and justice, a unity based on the nature of things as they are constituted, on man's *esse*. While in the face of danger men of good will may huddle together in a trembling fear for protection and wage a self-regarding combat against force the query may well arise and does, "What is there beyond necessity and expediency that binds us together?" It is here that the doctrine of the Pontiff is most telling. A unity of defense is no more a true unity than a unity of force: it is a unity of force in a different guise. The unity the Holy Father speaks of will in practice combat the unity of force: but it is not for that alone and exists independently of such necessity. It is a unity of the Mystical Body, of the Church which is one.

In the introduction to the America Press edition of the *Mystici Corporis* Father Bluett sums up the reasons Pope Pius gives for issuing the encyclical and says: "The second reason is our Holy Father's gratitude for the united love which his children all over the world, even though their countries are mutually at war, have continued to

manifest toward their common Father in Christ. The truth of the Mystical Body of Christ is the secret of this very unity."

But it is not in these encyclicals alone that we find the Holy Father engrossed in the doctrine of the Church and its unity. The arresting feature is that it reappears with such constancy in the shorter documents.

Summi Pontificatus (October 20, 1939) gives the rule for nations in their internal affairs and with each other. They are subject to the moral law and to the jurisdiction of the Church as the divinely appointed interpreter of that law.

In his appeals for native vocations⁵ it is the unity of effort and co-operation that God wills to be the instrument of the spread of His Church.

The central idea then, in the manifold teaching of Pope Pius XII is the Church—and the Church as the divinely established and preserved center of unity. In the background, but often explicit are, as introductions shall I say, or better as foundations, the unity of the Trinity, the unity of Christ, the unity of two natures in One Person, the unity of the Church, and the unity of truth and revelation.⁶

On the score of the number of times it has reappeared among his practical pleadings, that for peace stands, I think, easily first. What does an examination of them reveal? Is there a basis, a reason common to almost all? Over the years there has been a compelling consistency. Again and again he reaffirms that international peace must be based on justice and charity.⁷ And these virtues will flourish and be effective in so far as there is within the individual that right order, that unity whereby there is the proper subjection of body to mind and all to God.⁸ The prayer supreme of the Mystical Body, whereby we are made one with its Head and offer together once more His sacrifice, the Mass, is the means given to us by God and exercised

⁵ *Saeculo Exeunti Octavo*, June 13, 1940: *Evangelii Praecones*, June 2, 1951.

⁶ Cf., e.g., *Sempiternus Rex Christus*, September 8, 1951.

⁷ Cf., *Quoniam Paschalia Solemnia*, April 9, 1939: *Dum Gravissimum*, March 3, 1939: *Superiore Anno*, April 15, 1940: *In Questo Giorno*, December 24, 1939: *Novum Profecto*, October 27, 1940: *Vangelo di Oggi*, November 24, 1940: Christmas Allocution to the College of Cardinals, 1948.

⁸ *Quoniam Paschalia*; *In Questo Giorno*; *Novum Profecto*; *Dum Gravissimum*; *Sempre Dolce*, June 2, 1940.

by the Church to achieve these lofty ends for the individual and for nations.⁹

A second application of principle to human affairs that we meet with arresting frequency is our Holy Father's appeals to non-Catholics. And here again, always, it is a declaration that unity demands, and can be satisfied only in a return to the one Church which Christ founded, His Mystical Body.¹⁰

Still a third application which is most interesting to follow has to do with the Blessed Eucharist. How Pope Pius loves to recall It as a principle of unity in the Church and for multitudes! The legislation on the Eucharistic fast and on the hour at which Mass can be celebrated reflects his thought. The first reaction we all had on hearing it was that a very long step had been taken in concession to what is up to date, and the needs of the hour. And so it was. But as we re-read and pondered it we saw that it also looked to the past and particularly we became cognizant of the fact that this wedding of antiquity and modernity was performed in the interests of a more extensive and more frequent participation at the Festal Board of the Mystical Body for the promotion of that deeper and wider unity which all its members are to have in common.¹¹

No account of the theological implications of the literary output of Pope Pius XII can possibly omit his contributions to Marian thought. And here again we listen to the strains that have already caught our ear. And two notes there are that are predominant. Our Lady is a force of unity and an exemplification of it in the Church. She is God's mother because she is Christ's mother; she is our mother because she is Christ's mother: for we are one with Christ in the Church. Hence the efficacy of her prayers which His Holiness brings home to us by his frequent calls upon those prayers for peace.¹²

And again how plain does the teaching office of the Church be-

⁹ *Novum Profecto; Semper Dolce; Vangelo di Oggi; In Questa Sacra Vigilia*, December 24, 1942, *Optatissima Pax*, December 18, 1947, *In Multiplicibus Curis*, October 24, 1948; *Redemptoris Nostri*, April 15, 1949.

¹⁰ Cf. *Mystici Corporis*, America Press Edition, 1943, 120 ff., *Orientalis Omnes Ecclesias*, December 23, 1945; *Orientalis Ecclesiae*, April 9, 1944.

¹¹ Cf. *Mystici Corporis*, No. 98.

¹² *Communium Interpretis Dolorum*, April 15, 1945; *Auspicia Quaedam*, May 1, 1948.

come, the "Living Voice of Revelation"¹³ when we come face to face with the traditions and definitions that have to do with the Queen of Heaven. Are there some who question, and legitimately, whether certain statements about her are contained in revelation or more specifically in Scripture? Their doubts are answered by the Church. The official interpretation of the Holy See puts at rest the uneasy dilemma.¹⁴

The final consideration that we have proposed to answer briefly is the mutual effect of these pronouncements and the work of theologians. Putting the latter first I think you will find many examples of the effects of the discussions of the schools in the writings of the Holy Father. We all know how encyclicals are written, and other documents composed, and that in his wisdom the Pope consults theologians and experts in every discipline. But let us mention just a few of the points which show how keenly these writings reflect current thought. The doctrine of the Mystical Body itself had been the theme of countless articles and treatises. There are the carefully worded and weighed sentences on evolution; the evaluation of the contents of parts of the Old Testament. And every warning of a dangerous tendency has its positive connotation and paragraphs can be accounted for by their notice of and comment on the very debates and theories of the hour.

The effect of the Papal documents on current theology is somewhat easier to trace. A glance back at our own meetings and proceedings will illustrate the fact that while many subjects have been treated because our interests are wide, there has been a very large percentage of topics on the Church, tradition, the Magisterium, etc. And even in other branches very often the title assigned was a study specifically in view of the teaching, or even mention of the subject, in an encyclical.

A rather hurried perusal of the theological reviews seems to meet with the same results, viz., a greater proportion of articles on the Church and her functions and on reinvestigation of many disputed questions precisely in the light of Papal documents.

In concluding I may well follow the example of the Holy Father.

¹³ *Humani Generis*.

¹⁴ Cf. also *Divino Afflante Spiritu*, September 30, 1943.

In closing his more important and even his shorter writings and speeches he almost always invokes God's Blessed Mother. And so now shall I. In imitation of our Supreme Shepherd I shall place our Convention under the guiding inspiration of the soul of the Mystical Body, the Holy Spirit, and call upon her who was present when that Holy Spirit descended upon the Apostles at Pentecost, to protect us and pray for us, Queen of the Apostles, Queen of the Clergy, Queen of theologians.

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