

THE PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

In the early days of this Society the President opened the annual meeting with a warm word of welcome and a brief report on significant action taken by the Directors during the interval since the last general meeting. It was the Directors who proposed that this brief introductory report be replaced by a brief presidential address that would serve as "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."¹

It fell to Monsignor John M. Fearn, now an Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of New York, to effect this change directed by the Board and to deliver the first Presidential Address to the opening session of this Society as it convened in Baltimore in 1953. In search of subject and material Bishop Fearn directed his steps—prophetically, as it developed—*ad limina Apostolorum* and offered the members the fruit of his scholarly study of the theological content of the utterances of Pope Pius XII.

In the light of developments that began with the early morning medical bulletin of last October 6, announcing to an apprehensive world that "the Pope was stricken with cerebral circulatory disturbances,"² and took a new and unexpected turn with the consistorial allocation of last January 25, in which His Holiness, Pope John XXIII, "announced three events of the greatest importance, namely: a diocesan synod for Rome; the celebration of an Ecumenical Council for the universal Church; and the bringing up to date of the Code of Canon Law . . ."³—in the light of these developments since our last meeting it is fitting that we again retrace our steps *ad limina Apostolorum* and, as prelude to our discussions here under the gracious patronage of His Excellency, Bishop Burke, acknowledge the legacy we have received from Pius, *memoriae sanctae*, and appraise the task set before us by John, *feliciter regnante*.

At the inaugural meeting of this Society the founding members instructed the secretary to convey to the Holy Father the assurance of our loyalty and of our earnest desire for his blessing upon our

¹ John M. A. Fearn, "The Presidential Address," *CTSA Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Meeting*, 1953, p. 174.

² Quoted in *The Tablet*, Vol. 212, No. 6177, October 11, 1958, p. 300.

³ Quoted in *Unitas*, XI, 1, Spring, 1959, pp. 57-8.

work. It was, in Monsignor Shea's happy phrase, "the baptismal vow pronounced by our Society at its birth and christening."⁴ In grateful acknowledgment of that initial act of homage the Pontiff expressed his eager wish that the newly formed Society would prove most fruitful and imparted his loving blessing.⁵ It was an exchange that was altogether customary but by no means routine. The thirteen volumes that record the proceedings of this Society from its foundation in 1946 document at once our fidelity to that initial pledge of loyalty and, in part, the fruitfulness of that apostolic blessing.

The careful reader of those thirteen volumes will find in them reference to sixteen of the forty encyclicals of Pius XII; the dogmatic Bull, *Munificentissimus Deus*,⁶ defining the dogma of the Assumption; to four of the Apostolic Constitutions and *Motu Proprios* of his pontificate; and to a *quinquagintina* of his allocutions, letters, radio addresses and homilies. In more than 175 instances the participants in our annual meetings have invoked the wisdom and the science and have appealed to the authority of Pius XII in developing their assigned presentations. *Mystici Corporis*,⁷ *Mediator Dei*,⁸ *Humani Generis*,⁹ and *Haurietis Aquas*,¹⁰ of the encyclicals

⁴ George W. Shea, "Theology and the Magisterium," *CTSA Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Meeting*, 1957, p. 229.

⁵ Cf. *CTSA Proceedings of the Foundation Meeting*, 1946, p. 10.

⁶ Cf. Walter J. Burghardt, S.J., "The Catholic Concept of Tradition in the Light of Modern Theological Thought," *CTSA Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Meeting*, 1951, pp. 42, 43, 71, 74; Cyril Vollert, S.J., "Doctrinal Development: A Basic Theory," *Proceedings*, 1957, *passim*, pp. 45-70.

⁷ While not selected for individual consideration, *Mystici Corporis* is, with *Humani Generis*, the papal document most frequently cited in the annual proceedings. Cf. *Proceedings*, 1949, pp. 61, 118-119, 141; 1950, p. 177; 1951, p. 105; 1952, p. 95; 1953, pp. 125, 178, 180; 1954, p. 227; 1955, p. 141; 1956, p. 117.

⁸ Cf. Godfrey Diekmann, O.S.B., "Ascetical Implications of the *Mediator Dei*," *CTSA Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting*, 1949, p. 90.

⁹ Cf. Edmond D. Benard, "The Doctrinal Value of the Ordinary Teaching of the Holy Father, in View of *Humani Generis*," *CTSA Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Convention*, 1951, pp. 78-107; Cf. also Vollert, *loc. cit.*

¹⁰ Cf. Edward J. Hogan, S.S., "The Theology of the Devotion to the Sacred Heart," *CTSA Proceedings of the Twelfth Annual Convention*, 1957, pp. 157-168.

and the Constitution, *Sacramentum Ordinis*,¹¹ have been singled out for particularized study and discussion. The influence of other papal pronouncements, for example *Divino Afflante Spiritu*,¹² is noted in the very questions programmed for development during these annual sessions.

Much as these statistics tell, they do not tell the entire story. We have no record of our informal symposia. Each member has only his own warming memories of the private conversations that have always been such a rewarding part of these meetings. In these, too, the voice of Pius was heard. Certainly it would be no exaggeration to say that the chief, if not the sole subject of discussion in each year's symposium in moral theology was the contribution made to this branch of theological science by the pronouncements of the Holy Father during the preceding year.

The careful reader will note these references and citations. Struck by their frequency he might well imagine that this was our purpose, to meet annually to review the latest volume of the *Acta Apostolicae Sedis*. But our purpose remains as the founding members formulated it, primarily "to promote an exchange of views among Catholic theologians and to further studies and research in Sacred Theology . . . (secondarily) to relate theological science to current problems."¹³ If our every effort to achieve those objectives re-echoes with the voice of the "Angelic Pastor" is it not a manifestation of the living and vivifying magisterium Christ has established in His Church? Is it not evidence of our awareness of the truth remarked in the Presidential Address of two years ago that "sacred theology lives and moves and has its being in the sacred magisterium. Cut off from the latter, sacred theology would, like the branch cut off from the vine lose its life?"¹⁴

¹¹ Cf. Francis J. Connell, C.S.S.R., "The Apostolic Constitution *Sacramentum Ordinis*," *CTSA Proceedings of the Fourth Annual Meeting*, 1949, pp. 99-100.

¹² Cf. Roderick MacKenzie, S.J., "The Concept of Biblical Theology," *CTSA Proceedings of the Tenth Annual Convention*, 1955, pp. 48-66; David M. Stanley, S.J., "The Concept of Biblical Inspiration," *CTSA Proceedings of the Thirteenth Annual Convention*, 1958, pp. 65-89.

¹³ Cf. *Proceedings*, 1946, p. 13.

¹⁴ Shea, *loc. cit.*, p. 229.

If the volumes in which we have recorded our annual efforts to further theological science and its present-day applications would serve as a monument to Pius XII, so much the better. It is a monument that will grow as our scholars return again and again to the documents of his pontificate. It is a monument we must, in all honesty, inscribe, "To Pius XII, Supreme Pontiff—a memorial built not by design but rather born of filial devotion to the Apostolic See."

When death came to His Holiness, Pius XII there were many who conjectured that the next pontificate would be a providential respite with time for inventory of the treasures of pastoral wisdom and holiness to be found in the estimated 1,000 documents that record the intense and varied activity of the Holy See from March 12, 1939 to October 9, 1958. How mistaken their guess can be seen in the table of contents of our representative periodicals. There are, it is true, the predicted studies of Pius XII's contribution to Moral Medicine, to Pastoral Theology, to Ecclesiology, to Sacred Scripture, to Liturgy, but beside these and before them we find articles, historical, canonical, theological—some, it would seem, prophetic—prompted by Pope John XXIII's announcement of plans for an Ecumenical Council. Our course, apparently, moves from an era of Magisterium acclaimed as extraordinary to the rare, historic moment of Magisterium that will be extraordinary by definition.

We were surprised by Pope John's announcement. So, too, it is reported, were the Cardinals gathered about him in consistory at St. Paul's Basilica. The response to the announcement by those separated from us was prompt. As was to be expected it reflected the degrees and depth of the differences that divide us. It ranged from hopeful, if somewhat ambiguous enthusiasm¹⁵ through the cautious endorsement of the General Secretary of the World Council of Churches¹⁶ to the blunt observation of the contributor to *The*

¹⁵ The comment, for example, of Orthodox Bishop James Virvos, "In all our services we pray daily for the union and stability of the Churches. I am bound to say that this is a great move on the part of the Pope, and that I hope it is inspired by the spirit of the Christian Church as it was experienced in the first ten centuries when the Church was one and undivided." Cf. *Unitas*, *loc. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁶ Quoted in *The Living Church*, 138, No. 9, March 1, 1959, p. 10.

Christian Century who wrote that the only step toward religious unity that the Council could take would be to repeal the dogma of papal infallibility.¹⁷

Some of the comment has been saddening for it discloses how deep and long-standing the divisions between the Church and some elements of the Christian community. The comment reveals, too, how poorly men understand the true nature of the Church and her salvific purposes. As once the Head, so now the Mystical Body must complain to her contemporaries, "Have you been with me so long and have not known?"

But there is no reason for dismay, however unresponsive some may be to this appeal for reunion. In the first place it should be noted that reunion was not the sole nor, indeed, was it the first of the reasons prompting the Holy Father to this action. In announcing his plans for a diocesan synod, code revision, and general council, the Pontiff explained that he was moved by his solicitude for the spiritual life of the faithful at a time when the pastoral care of souls is rendered more difficult while technical progress has intensified the attraction of material things and speeded the diffusion of error.¹⁸

In the first public address of his Pontificate, Pope John XXIII, with open heart, extended outstretched arms to all those separated from the Apostolic See, inviting them in ardent terms to return freely and gladly to the house of their common father.¹⁹ In his Christmas Message he announced his intention to work humbly and fervently for unity, "the duty urged upon Us by the words and example of Jesus, the Divine Good Shepherd."²⁰ In the same message he told us that the living substance of the teaching of his predecessor is

¹⁷ "Pope John XXIII Plans a World Church Council," *The Christian Century*, LXXVI, 5, February 4, 1959, pp. 124-125.

¹⁸ Cf. *Questa festiva ricorrenza*, Solemn Allocution, Jan. 25, 1959, *AAS*, LI (1959), 2, pp. 67-68.

¹⁹ Cf. *Hac trepida hora*, Radio Address, Oct. 29, 1958, *AAS*, L (1958), 17, p. 840.

²⁰ "Noi intendiamo proseguire umilmente ma fervidamente il Nostro compito a cui Ci spronano la parola e l'esempio che Gesù, il Buon Pastore divino, continua a darci nella visione delle messi che biancheggiano sui vasti campi missionari; 'et illas oportet me adducere, . . . et fiet unum ovile et unus pastor.'" *Vi siamo grati*, Christmas Message, 1958, *AAS*, LI (1959), 1, p. 10.

summarized in two comprehensive words, unity and peace.²¹ It was to be expected that while considering a General Council to serve the spiritual needs of the faithful he would not neglect the exceptional opportunity it would offer to further religious unity.

The fact that this added purpose was publicized so widely and exclusively in the early reports of the Pope's historic allocution is added evidence of the growing desire of men for the end of religious division. It should not be permitted to obscure the fact that in turning to the age-old practice of convoking a Council and conferring with the bishops of the whole world, *whom the Holy Spirit has chosen to rule the Church of God*,²² Pope John XXIII intends, as did his predecessors in similar action,

"to concentrate energies, to decide prudently and wisely on all that can help to define the dogmas of faith, to unmask new errors, to defend, illustrate and develop Catholic doctrine, to preserve and tighten the bonds of ecclesiastical discipline, to strengthen the relaxed morals of peoples."²³

It is not difficult to see in these traditional objectives of the conciliar action of the Church contributions to the cause of religious unity. But since the Pope has indicated that it will serve as an "invitation to the separated communities toward the quest of that Unity to which so many today aspire in all parts of the world,"²⁴ we have reason to expect of the forthcoming Council a distinctive effort toward religious unity. The fact that we can only conjecture and cannot foresee decisions or institutions by which a Council might effect a return of the separated to living unity is not surprising. It would be presumptuous to expect of individuals, however expert, or groups, however representative, that wisdom proper to the Church in Council.

The indirect contributions are more apparent—the renewal of enthusiasm for the work of unity; the increase of persevering, confident prayer for the attainment of this goal which man can-

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

²² Acts 20, 28.

²³ Pius IX, Bull, *Aeterni Patris, Collectio Lacensis*, VII, 1, col. 2.

²⁴ *AAS*, LI (1959), 2, p. 69.

not devise, God alone can give; greater awareness of the ecumenical instrumentalities, *Una Sancta, Unitas*, the religious congregations and communities dedicated to reunion, already long at work as evidence of the Catholic Church's unfailing efforts *that all may be one*; ²⁵ deepened understanding of true religious unity and with it new insight into the very nature of the Church. These are the most evident. But it is in the reflection of the wisdom of the Church assembled in Council we find the most appropriate conclusion to this introduction to our program.

Cardinal Montini has declared, "This council will be the greatest which the Church has ever celebrated in its twenty centuries of history, a great confluence both numerically and spiritually, representing the total and pacific unity of the hierarchy of the Church. It will be the greatest for the universality of its dimensions and for its genuine interest to the entire world."²⁶ We might add that religious oppressors who would deny Bishops their rightful access to the Council, far from destroying the catholicity of the Council, will only serve to illustrate the supernatural source of the unity and catholicity in evidence there.

The world will not merely witness the assembling of the Council, although that alone will be a compelling demonstration of true ecumenicity. By every modern device of communication, including, it would seem, television, the world will be in touch, as never before, with the very deliberations of the Council. The role of the Bishops of the Church in these deliberations may escape the non-Catholic observer. What should not escape him is the sincerity and the gravity, the generosity and the scholarliness of their deliberations. Is it too much to expect that this experience of the Magisterium in solemn action will prove to be, in many cases, a personal, compelling reason to return?

The theologian whether he is privileged to play a part in the preparations of the Council or merely views its work from afar will be alert to the precise share of the conciliar bishops in this exercise of the Church's teaching authority. Textbook treatises will come to life as Bishops in manifest union with the Holy Father exercise

²⁵ John 17, 21.

²⁶ *Unitas*, loc. cit., p. 59.

supreme jurisdiction, delineating the truths of faith, determining the practices to be observed. Vivid and inspiring also will be the twofold relationship of the theologian to this authority—submission in homage to the teaching authority established by Christ and as the condition of truth and fruitfulness in his labors, participation, to the degree that he is invited to counsel or mandated to share the teaching office.

That experience born of the Church in Council is still some months ahead. We may anticipate the feelings it will occasion then as we remember the relationship that is presently ours to the Church's ordinary teaching authority. We may fittingly begin this Fourteenth Annual Meeting acknowledging, with deep humility, the privilege that is ours in serving the authentic teachers of revealed truth and renewing our pledge of filial submission to their authority.

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