

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: DEVELOPMENT OF THE CTSA IN THE POST-CONCILIAR CHURCH

Vatican II has not only wrought far-ranging and deep changes in the life and thinking of the Church, it has also handed on a spirit and entrusted us with a project. The spirit is the spirit of openness, of community, of optimism, and love of growth. The project is the transformation of the Church.

The realization of both these truths is of primary importance for the Catholic Theological Society of America. The Society itself has most obviously been caught up in this mood of renewal, and must, therefore, work toward a new self-awareness of its role and purpose in the post-conciliar Church. For this reason I would like to devote my time, not to a consideration of any particular theological problem, but to the CTSA itself.

When I speak of a new self-awareness I do not mean in any way to cast aspersions on the past. Since its inception, and through difficult days, the Society has grown with the times and benefitted the Church in this country enormously. It is today a strong Society because of the strong convictions and dedicated labor of theologians from all over North America.

The aims and purposes of the Society were expressed in Article I of the Constitution and By-Laws. It reads as follows:

This association shall be known as the Catholic Theological Society of America. Its primary object shall be to promote an exchange of views among Catholic theologians and to further studies and research in sacred theology. Its secondary object shall be to relate theological science to current problems.

The times in which those lines were written and the immediate background against which they were composed differed markedly from our own. As Vatican II brought change into the Church, it amplified our view of the Church, and extended our ecclesial horizons. The CTSA must of necessity, it seems to me, understand its aims and purposes in light of these changes in attitude. Our new

self-awareness should be the result of understanding the horizons Vatican II has opened to us.

When I speak of a new self-awareness, I mean an awareness achieved within the whole body of theologians who make up our Society. It can be achieved only by continued conversation, open discussion and genuine debate. Even when it is achieved, it will be realized as a complex phenomenon. Uniformity is certainly not the desired goal. Our awareness will include the consciousness of genuine diversity—in itself a sign of health. Nevertheless, we must, I believe, strive more than ever for a broad consensus concerning the role and purposes of the Society. If we do not achieve it, I fear the effectiveness of the Society will be dissipated at a most crucial moment in the Church's history.

During the past year certain trends developed within the Society which indicate a new understanding of the role of the Society in today's concrete world. These trends, if I may call them such, were initiated by the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors, of course, is the governing body of the Society, and is also representative of its membership. If these present trends are to continue, it is more important than ever that the officers truly represent the membership. It is more important than ever that the structures of the Society make possible the achievement of genuine consensus, at least in the area of aims and purposes. For these reasons the Board of Directors decided to make provision for a longer business meeting this year, and to make certain significant changes, in accordance with the constitution, in the way elections are conducted. This year the Committee on Nominations will place before us two names for vice-president, and four names for the board of directors, thereby assuring us of choice. As usual, nominations can also be made from the floor.

What are the trends that developed within this Society this year? First, the Society became actively engaged in attempting to bring about conditions deemed essential for the healthy growth and development of theology in the United States. Second, we tended to accentuate, in these activities, a problem that seems central to the welfare of theology today, the problem of freedom and responsibility. I would like to say a few words about each of these trends.

As to the first: three times in the course of the past year the Officers of the Society, in one case in conjunction with the Committee on Current Problems, have intervened to make their views known on important contemporary issues related to theology. One: You will recall that at the last convention a resolution was passed empowering the Officers of the Society and the Committee on Current Problems to communicate with the Bishops of the country about previous censorship of books and articles. The persons so empowered used that authorization, and on November 4, 1966, after much consultation, I sent a letter to every member of the American Hierarchy, stating it was the sentiment of our Society that present procedures of previous censorship should be liberalized. Two: In November of 1966 Bishop Alexander M. Zaleski, who happily is our guest at this convention, was chosen to head the newly created Bishops' Commission of Doctrine. Bishop Zaleski almost immediately thereafter wrote to me and suggested I meet with him to discuss ways and means of establishing structures to facilitate communications between the Bishops' Commission of Doctrine and the CTSA. With his approval I appointed three other members to accompany me as a committee of four. The other members of the committee were Fathers Walter J. Burghardt, Eamon Carroll, and Gerald Van Ackeren. Two were past presidents, and the third, Walter Burghardt, is this year's vice-president. Later I shall return to other aspects of that meeting, which took place on December 16, 1966 at Lansing, Michigan. At this point I would mention only these two items of conversation. A) We expressed our strong hope that the Bishops' Commission would positively and optimistically encourage the work of theology in our country. This was nothing more than accentuating the spirit of the Council, a spirit I have already described as the spirit of openness, community, optimism, and love of growth. B) We asked Bishop Zaleski to accept a statement from the Board of Directors with respect to the famous letter of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, widely known as Cardinal Ottaviani's letter. He graciously consented. On March 15, 1967, again after consultation with the Board of Directors, I sent Bishop Zaleski a statement embodying our reaction to the Congregation's letter. In general, we expressed our concern over the wording and content of

the Congregation's letter. We expressed apprehension over the atmosphere of secrecy surrounding the letter and the procedures it suggested. We made a strong plea for full episcopal support for our theological endeavors in this country, free from an atmosphere of suspicion. Three: On April 20, 1967, during the controversy at Catholic University over the dismissal of Father Charles Curran, we issued a statement expressing our astonishment and concern over the summary procedure employed by the Board of Trustees. We publicly supported the judgment of the theological faculty of the University in its expression of confidence in Father Curran, and asked that the decision of dismissal be rescinded.

Now each of these interventions means that this year's Board of Directors believed the Society should express itself on matters which affect the conditions in which the work of theology must be done. Should we continue to express ourselves in this way? I believe so. The community of theologians in this country must be able to seek optimum conditions for scholarly work. Nevertheless, other members of this Society may feel differently, and may want to express their opinion to the contrary or may want to stipulate cautions. This year's business meeting will permit such discussion.

The second trend is to see freedom of inquiry and expression as a central issue in today's theological world. Though a cliché, it nevertheless bears repeating that theology can accomplish its post-conciliar task only in an atmosphere of freedom and a climate of trust. That is why the Society asked for liberalization of the previous censorship procedures; that is why it expressed acute concern over the contents and attitude of the letter from Cardinal Ottaviani's Congregation; that is why it spoke so strongly in the controversy at Catholic University.

Now there is considerable evidence that most members of this Society share this deep concern for the problem of freedom and trust. I believe, however, that it is our serious obligation to come to a clear understanding and expression of precisely what we mean by freedom. We must articulate what we mean by freedom, and indicate its necessity, in such a way that trust from authority will be a natural response. This also requires serious dialog within the Society.

I think we must begin that dialog from the theologian's experi-

ence as he faces the work of theology in the present age. He is first of all deeply aware of change. The Council has marked him forever. In comparing Vatican II with the Councils which preceded it, he sees the difference of language, it is no longer scholastic; he sees the different intent and purpose, it is no longer polemic; he sees the principle of amplification working when he compares the *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church* and the *Decree on Ecumenism* with post Tridentine theology and the Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*; he sees the contrast between Vatican II and the magisterium of the past century on the question of religious liberty; he is deeply aware of the implications of possible change in the Church's teaching on birth control. All of these factors lead him inevitably to ask searching questions about the Church's past magisterial pronouncements.

He is also aware of the impact of historical consciousness in modern theology. He knows that different cultures apprehend and express truth in accordance with their own cultural forms, and that this argues to a certain relativity in the concepts that give expression to the truth. He is thereby aware of the great problem of absolutes. He knows that it is no longer sufficient to quote the *ipsissima verba* of magisterial pronouncements, he must also know, besides the history and background of individual teaching, the problematic that gave it meaning.

The contemporary theologian is aware of the great problem of perspective. Change has taken place in the Church before, but in the past, change could be looked at from the perspective of classical culture. Change is accidental, substance perdures. This gave the theologian of the past a perspective, a perspective that is in question today. The theologian is aware that this problem of perspective is producing anxiety in the Church, especially among those whose vocation it is to teach the divine message with authority.

Above all, the contemporary theologian is aware of the inevitability of questions that arise from the spirit of our age. He is not free not to be aware of these questions, and his solemn obligation is to deal with them. The freedom he asks for is not so much the freedom to ask questions, since most of our contemporary questions are inevitable. The freedom he needs is the freedom to seek the theological truth to which these questions will lead him.

Lastly, in confronting the problems of our age the theologian is aware of authority in the Church. But he sees authority as a communal affair. He and the hierarchy of the Church live in the same world, accept the same faith, participate in the same charity. He asks authority to be aware of his problems, understand his anxiety, have sympathy with his goals, and above all, trust his sincerity. He even asks for the right to make mistakes.

This emphasis on the atmosphere of freedom required for theological work has, of course, the ultimate purpose of service to the Church, the People of God. I have especially in mind the service the CTSA can and should perform for the Bishops of our country. The development of this concept of service to the Bishops of the United States was also part of the Society's history this year.

When we wrote to the hierarchy about previous censorship, we not only asked for liberation of present procedures, we also expressed our realization that the problem was complex. Indeed, within the Board of Directors and the Committee on Current Problems there was wide diversity of opinion about how liberalization should take place. Admitting the complexity of the problem, therefore, we offered the services of the Society to the Bishops, and said we would be happy to study the problem in detail, and make concrete proposals for modification of present procedures.

When the Committee of four met with Bishop Zaleski, we assured him, and through him the Bishops' Theological Commission, that the Society would be most happy to cooperate with the Bishops' Commission at their request. Bishop Zaleski has already asked us to make certain studies of theological problems, and we have consented to do so. Last night, at this convention, the dialog between the Board of Directors and Bishop Zaleski continued. One of the problems facing this year's Board of Directors is the problem of creating structures and procedures for responding to these requests from the Bishops' Theological Commission. If work of this kind is to be done, it means, of course, that members of the Society will be asked to give somewhat generously of their time and talent in order to render service not only to the hierarchy, but also the Church itself.

I believe there is one other service we can and should perform, to the best of our ability, and that is the study of the whole problem of

academic freedom in our seminaries, colleges, and universities. I would hope that the Society, through its members, could study this whole problem, participate with other societies concerned with this problem, and attempt to reach certain concerted guidelines that would be of assistance not only to the Bishops of our country, but also to those in positions of administrative responsibility.

In brief, we are moving into a new era of dialog—dialog with the hierarchy of our country. The Council has produced the atmosphere. It is now our opportunity to move into a new period of responsibility. To exercise that responsibility we must become and remain aware of the importance of the Society's structure. We must assure maximum participation of the membership in the activities and decisions of the Society.

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