

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

### CATHOLIC THEOLOGY, 1974: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Two of my recent predecessors have raised, in their own presidential addresses, the question of the continued existence of the Catholic Theological Society of America.

At our Washington, D.C., convention in that fateful year of 1968, Walter Burghardt asked: "Should we link with a similar, or dissimilar, organization—the College Theology Teachers [*sic*], the American Theological Society, the American Humanist Society? Or should we cease to exist? In a word, can we, in hard-nose reality, justify our actual, independent, relatively unproductive existence? I say no."<sup>1</sup> Those of you who were present at that session and who may have been stunned by so ominous a pronouncement from so insightful a critic were undoubtedly reassured by Father Burghardt's reappearance at last year's New York convention as its keynote speaker. The earlier judgment was neither reaffirmed nor retracted. *Qui tacet consentire videtur?*

At the Detroit convention in 1970 Charles Curran, too, posed the survival question but offered, at the same time, a probationary stay of execution. "If the Society does not eagerly embrace these opportunities of developing the discipline of theology as such and of serving the Church through theological research and discussion of particular points," he insisted, "then one should really question our continued existence. This seems to be the choice which is facing us as a Society now and in the future."<sup>2</sup>

Unless we have concluded at this year's convention that there is indeed no such enterprise as Catholic theology and no such academic breed as Catholic theologians, the question of the continued existence of the CTSA is largely moot. The Catholic Theological Society of America exists, and at times it has even shown the capacity to flourish.

<sup>1</sup>"Presidential Address: Towards an American Theology," *CTSA Proceedings* 23 (1969), 27.

<sup>2</sup>"Presidential Address," *CTSA Proceedings* 25 (1971), 233.

In my judgment, it will continue to exist—and flourish—so long as its annual conventions are theologically rich and provocative enough to attract a broad cross-section of serious and productive theologians. The CTSA is not likely to expire through excessive theoretical soul-searching. Given the realities of professional and institutional competitiveness today, it is far more likely to expire if its officers and board of directors offer the membership two or three inferior conventions, *seriatim*. Nothing will mortally wound the CTSA as surely as weak or poor programs; nothing will invigorate it as surely as good or excellent programs. I hope this year's offering has accelerated our movement in life's direction.

If you agree, as I do, with the central premise of John Connelly's paper that there is indeed a Roman Catholic tradition and a Roman Catholic theology which works out of, and upon, that tradition, then the question is not *whether* we can and ought to make a distinctive impact upon the present religious scene but rather *how* we are to make that impact most effectively. That general question is divisible.

It seems to me that there are at least seven problems of varying degrees of importance and immediacy facing American Catholic theologians in 1974. These problems, and the questions they generate, are highly contemporary in both tone and content. I assume that my successors in years to come, as they probe through the *Proceedings* of this convention in search of an idea or two for their own presidential addresses, will find that most of these questions have been resolved by time. A few of the topics will seem marginal—tempests of teapot proportions. But I am speaking for today and tomorrow, not for history. I have no Nixonian passion for documentary immortality.

The first question emerges from Andrew Greeley's review of my latest book, *The Remaking of the Church*.<sup>3</sup> Father Greeley complains that theologians are concerned too much about structure and too little about meaning, and for that reason non-theologians like himself have felt compelled to enter the breach, without portfolio, and do some of our work for us.

"I have been appalled in the seven or eight years during which I have been associated with the international theological journal, *Concilium*," Greeley writes, "to discover that theologians are willing to

<sup>3</sup>(New York: Harper & Row, 1973).

pontificate on almost every subject under the sun—politics, economics, ecology, political and social structures, war and peace—you name it and they have answers. But they seem relatively unconcerned with the ultimate issues of life and death, of meaning and absurdity, of purpose and love.”<sup>4</sup>

Does Andrew Greeley have a case? Are theologians too often to be found stumbling ineptly through the back-alleys and side-streets of complicated political, sociological, and cultural questions while ignoring the most pressing problems along both sides of their own disciplinary boulevard? Surely there is some merit to the charge. Surely we have dabbled at times, skimming off a new vocabulary but missing the substance beneath. On the other hand, theology has to be done in a manner that respects both poles: the Christian fact and the human situation. The human situation *is* political in shape, as it is economic, ecological, and cultural. The issues of “life and death, of meaning and absurdity, of purpose and love” are inseparable from these other dimensions. In the final accounting, nothing human can be excluded from the realm of theological reflection. But that, of course, is just the point. The reflection must be at all times theological. Concern for the oppressed in the Third World or at home is a matter of abiding Christian responsibility, but not every expression of concern for the oppressed is, for that reason, theological. We are actually doing theology only when we are in the process of struggling to articulate, in a more or less systematic manner, our presumed perception of the transcendent in our contemporary experience and in our corporate histories. Theology is an orderly reflection on our experience of God. Christian theology is an orderly reflection on our experience of God as definitively disclosed in Jesus Christ.

The problem, therefore, is not that we are treating issues that are beyond the range of the theologian's competence but that we are treating such issues too often in a non-theological manner. The intensified discussion of theological method in recent years, I submit, is not simply a knife-whetting exercise. Too many Roman Catholics had for too long confused the paraphrastic defense of papal and conciliar pronouncements with the theological process itself, and too many Prot-

<sup>4</sup>“Would the New Church be Better for People?” *National Catholic Reporter* 10 (January 25, 1974), 11.

estants had committed similar confusions with regard to the Bible. But confusion is hardly the private preserve of the theological Right. In our own time we have seen a re-emergence of the liberal reductionism of the nineteenth century. Social commentary has been identified with theological speculation. Correlation is destroyed: the Christian fact yields completely to a human situation disengaged from its transcendental ground.

What I have been saying about theology in general applies to ecclesiology in particular. Both ecclesiology and the sociology of religion are concerned with the phenomenon of the Church. What is it that distinguishes the two disciplines? The ecclesiologist, unlike the sociologist, apprehends the Church as a mystery, "a reality imbued with the hidden presence of God," to use the words of Pope Paul VI.<sup>5</sup> The ecclesiologist remains the theologian because the Church-problem is, in the final analysis, an aspect of the God-problem. The ecclesiologist grapples with the experience of God as God is manifested in and through the community called the Church. Accordingly, concern for the institutional reform of the Church is as legitimate and, at times, as pressing for the theologian as it might be for the sociologist. How the Church structures itself is, in large measure, how the Church sacramentalizes Christ's presence among us. Part of the Church's essential mission is to be a credible sign of the kingdom of God, of the redemptive presence of God in the world. To the extent that certain of the Church's institutional components obscure rather than illuminate that divine presence, to that same extent must the Church be reinstitutionalized. Reinstitutionalized, however, not simply on the basis of practical efficiency or democratic imperatives, but on the basis of our corporate responsibility to God, to the Christ of God, and to the Spirit of God, that their triune presence might become so transparent that men and women throughout the world "will be aroused to a lively hope . . . that they will finally be caught up in peace and utter happiness in that fatherland radiant with the splendor of the Lord."<sup>6</sup> The institutional reform of the Church may not be at the top of our list of theological priorities, but it belongs on the list somewhere as an item theologians should confront with

<sup>5</sup>*The Documents of Vatican II*, ed. by W. M. Abbott and J. Gallagher (New York: Guild, American and Association Presses, 1966), p. 14, n. 1.

<sup>6</sup>*Gaudium et spes*, Vatican Council II, n. 93.

neither reluctance nor embarrassment. On the contrary.

My second question was suggested initially at least four years ago in Charles Curran's presidential address. "It is an unfortunate fact," he said at our Detroit convention, "that in the Roman Catholic Church in the United States there are very few contributing theologians who have been teaching theology for more than ten or fifteen years. As a result, it has been necessary for many younger people in the field to assume leadership positions and deprive themselves of the time and conditions necessary to pursue their theological development at this important stage."<sup>7</sup>

Have some of our younger Catholic theologians in fact been intellectually penalized because of the apparent unwillingness of more mature theologians to assume positions of leadership in those awkward post-conciliar years? Certainly no younger American Catholic theologian has expended more energy more constructively in the service of his Church than Charles Curran himself. The CTSA acknowledged its indebtedness to him through the conferral of the John Courtney Murray Award in 1972.<sup>8</sup> But for all of that, he, like several other younger colleagues, was banned from dioceses, denounced in national episcopal meetings, and derided or written off by some older practitioners of the discipline. It is time perhaps that some of us were given an opportunity to study, to think, and to reflect more deeply on the mysteries that constitute the content of our discipline and on the human situation that constitutes its only real context. But that will not and cannot happen if older respected theologians continue to check their critical apparatus at the door at the first sign of a *Humanae vitae*, a *Lex Fundamentalis*, or a *Mysterium ecclesiae*.

The primary task of the Catholic theologian is not, as Cardinal Carlo Colombo once insisted, the defense of magisterial (i.e., papal-episcopal) pronouncements.<sup>9</sup> Our first allegiance is to the truth—a truth, to be sure, received and perceived in the context of the whole community of faith, but a truth embraced for its own saving sake and not as a rationale for the institutional *status quo*, not as ideology.

<sup>7</sup>CTSA Proceedings 25 (1971), 221.

<sup>8</sup>See the citation in CTSA Proceedings 27 (1973), 175-6.

<sup>9</sup>"Obedience to the Ordinary Magisterium," in *Obedience and the Church*, Karl Rahner, et al. (Washington: Corpus Brooks, 1968), p. 92.

Theology is not a branch of ecclesiastical diplomacy. It is a discipline in the service of the Church, but what it offers the Church is criticism—vigorous and independent criticism. We are not the Church's Ron Zieglers; we are her Tom Wickers.

A third question to be unpacked is prompted by a relatively recent development in the often fierce and intemperate warfare between theologians and biblical scholars, on the one hand, and right-wing or traditionalist Catholic editors and columnists, on the other. Are we too sensitive to these attacks and have we allowed ourselves to be distracted from our real work because of them? The question admittedly applies to very few members of this Society. How many of you, after all, have made the front page of *The Wanderer* for three consecutive weeks this year—or even one of the back pages?

This disagreeable matter seemed to be coming to a head a month or two ago when Bishop Rausch, the executive secretary for the National Conference of Catholic Bishops and the United States Catholic Conference, gave some the impression, mistaken to be sure, that he favored the silencing and/or censuring of such critics on the grounds that they do not possess the appropriate academic credentials to justify their vigorously negative assessments of the scholars.

The most unsettling suggestion I personally received in the midst of this recent controversy came from an officer of one of our sister professional societies. He proposed that Catholic scholars ally themselves with the bishops against the right-wing on the grounds that the right-wing editors and columnists were in fact usurping the magisterial authority of the bishops. The magisterium of the Church, I responded, belongs to the whole Church, even though the teaching mission is exercised in different ways according to different ministries. The traditionalist Catholic, too, shares in that magisterial responsibility. If he concludes, however incorrectly, that the public positions of certain scholars are contrary to the Catholic faith as he understands it, then we should recognize and defend his right to say so. Where the right-of-center Catholic exceeds the limits of both journalistic propriety and Christian ethics is at that point where he accuses the scholar not only of material heresy but of formal heresy as well. It is one thing to say that Theologian X is damaging the Church; it is entirely another to say that he is *deliberately* damaging the Church. There has been too much of that kind of charac-

terization. It is wrong, and it cannot be defended. On the other hand, there are more important things for serious theologians to do than prepare rebuttals to these kinds of attacks. As Karl Rahner reminded us in his little study on heresy, "the temptation arises to combat heresy to a certain extent only by administrative means . . . instead of by means of the *teaching* office, that is by such positive formulation of the true doctrine that the error is really supplanted."<sup>10</sup> The most effective long-term response to our vehement critics on the Right is the maintenance of the highest standards of theological scholarship in all that we do, or say, or write.

If some few of us have been too preoccupied with this constant shelling from the Golan Heights of Catholic traditionalism, others have been nearly obsessed with the attitude and opinions of bishops regarding themselves and the CTSA. A concern of this sort has become an almost regular item for discussion at our semi-annual board of directors' meetings over the past five or six years. How can we regain and/or maintain the confidence of the American hierarchy? What can we do to remove whatever barriers exist between us? What initiatives ought we to take? What services should we offer? What public posturing should we avoid lest our efforts at reconciliation be aborted? And so on and so forth. One of the wisest comments I heard in all of those exchanges came from Avery Dulles, who served with us on the board from 1970 to 1972. We should be far more intent about doing good theology, he said with some measure of exasperation. That is how we are expected to serve the Church. By doing well at what we're supposed to be doing.

Thus, Question #4: Are some American Catholic theologians indeed worried more about getting along with the bishops than about doing first-rate theology? The worry is inappropriate not only because it does distract us from our primary responsibility but also because the friction between us is often more imagined than real. This spring, for example, forty American bishops contributed more than fifty-five hundred dollars to our general fund, and there wasn't a single abusive letter in the whole lot. The donors can be found at every major point on the ecclesiastical spectrum from right to left.

On the other hand, we theologians ought not to be naive about our relations with the Church's pastoral leadership. The conflicts are still

<sup>10</sup>"On Heresy," in *Inquiries* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964), p. 458.

there, and are not always healthy. Earlier this year, for example, I was asked by the new chairman of the Bishops' Committee on Doctrine to propose, on behalf of the CTSA, some names of theologians who might accompany the American delegates to the Fourth International Synod of Bishops in Rome this October. A poll of the entire board of directors showed two CTSA members clearly in the lead over all other nominees. Neither one of them was selected nor even asked. Furthermore, one of the two *periti* chosen happens to be a man who resigned from the CTSA a few years ago and has since been expressing himself with some vigor on what he regards to be the considerable deficiencies of the American Catholic theological community. That appointment was, unwittingly or not, a provocative one.

But why do more than make a note of it? What is more important: that Theologian X attends the Synod, or that Theologian X continues to do high-calibre work on the synodal topic; in this instance, evangelization? On the other hand, official documents which are formulated without the collaboration of our best scholars often fail to measure up to standards and are, for that reason, quickly consigned to the limbo of neglect. Ideological pettiness which excludes respected theologians because they are perceived to be "too liberal" or "too controversial" is, in the end, self-defeating.

That some Catholic theologians should still be intensely concerned about diplomatic relations with the hierarchy raises yet another question, Question #5: Do Catholic theologians in the United States have, even today, a proper understanding of the autonomy they require to do their work? Many of us do; some of us still do not. It is never a total surprise when a Catholic spokesman outside the field of theology makes some egregious statement about the nature of theology and about its relationship to faith and doctrine. Even cardinals who should know better have displayed a remarkable ignorance of some of the most basic—and, one might say, cardinal—theses of fundamental theology. But when theologians themselves uncritically embrace these common distortions of their proper ecclesial roles and of the nature and task of their discipline, then it's another matter entirely. A recent letter from one of our members to a national Catholic newspaper implies, for example, that an authentic Catholic theologian is one who accepts, without substantial dissent, every Roman document of a theological and/or



doctrinal nature.<sup>11</sup> It is a mentality which Bernard Lonergan described so tellingly in his *Method in Theology*: "It conceived the function of the theologian to be that of a propagandist for Church doctrines. He did his duty when he repeated, explained, defended just what had been said in Church documents. He had no contribution of his own to make and so there could be no question of his possessing any autonomy in making it. . . . The theologian is just a parrot with nothing to do but repeat what has already been said."<sup>12</sup>

We do not hear nearly enough these days about the succession of teachers alongside the concept of apostolic succession. Raising the issue of a succession of teachers opens one of the most emotional debates in the contemporary Catholic Church, on the relative authority of bishops and theologians. There are bishops who, for some mysteriously perverse reason, delight in assuring their audiences that theologians have absolutely no official or authoritative standing in the Church. What theologians say and write is strictly a matter of their own personal opinion, to be taken with no greater seriousness than, let us say, the gruff fulminations of an acerbic preacher—perhaps even with less seriousness. This view cannot be sustained, theologically nor biblically. As New Testament scholar Myles Bourke has written:

If there is any group in the Church which has the right to be heard when the Church makes decisions, it is that composed of those to whom the charism of teaching has been given, the *didaskaloi*, who, in the list of 1 Cor 12:28 rank third after the apostles and the prophets. If the charism now exists in the Church apart from the hierarchy—and to deny that it does is utterly arbitrary—it is surely possessed by the theologians. If the 'whole Church' is to have a part in the making of decisions, particularly in the making of decisions which bear upon the content of faith, the proper authority of the theologians must be given much more weight than is often the case in the present functioning of the Church.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Thomas Dubay, S.M., "Review No Competition to Rahner," *National Catholic Reporter* 10 (May 31, 1974), 10.

<sup>12</sup>(New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), pp. 330-1.

<sup>13</sup>"Collegial Decision-Making in the New Testament," in *Who Decides for the Church? Studies in Co-Responsibility*, ed. by J. A. Coriden (Hartford: Canon Law Society of America, 1971), p. 13.

Question #6: But if many of us do have a genuine sense of our own autonomy within the Church, do we, at the same time, have an adequate sense of our identity as Roman Catholic theologians?

Several years ago, in the earlier days of the ecumenical movement, the dean of one of this country's most distinguished divinity schools complained about the style of certain Roman Catholics in dialogue situations. The Catholic was sometimes more conversant with, and sympathetic toward, the theological tradition of the Protestant side than he was with, and toward, his own. This was all very reassuring to the Protestant participants but it didn't advance the discussion to any significant degree. The Protestants still had to send out for a bona fide Roman Catholic. True ecumenism requires that each of the major traditions be in fact represented around the table and that each tradition be explained and analyzed by those who know it best, from within.

A second anecdotal item further illustrates the point. It comes from a recent experience of mine in trying to advise a doctoral student regarding his program for next year. He proposed that one of his courses should bring him into direct touch with one of the major theologians of our century. This concern was laudable enough, to be sure. Studying one major theologian in depth, absorbing his method and approach, examining the interconnected elements of his overall system significantly clarifies and sharpens one's own theological perceptions. But the scholar my Roman Catholic student had in mind was Tillich. I asked if he had already done that kind of sustained study of Karl Rahner, and he replied that he had not. But would not this student be working inescapably out of a Roman Catholic tradition? In his future work as a teacher and scholar, would he not be perceived by his colleagues on both sides of the Reformation-divide as a theologian of Roman Catholic background? Would not his peers, especially those outside the Roman Catholic community, have a right to expect that he, as a Roman Catholic theologian, be able to communicate the substance of that tradition clearly and competently? Rahner, it seemed to me, would provide a much better starting-point for a young Roman Catholic theologian than Tillich—or Barth, or any other Protestant for that matter. For, indeed, if the Roman Catholic tradition does not make a determinative impact on the work of Karl Rahner, then I have no idea whose work is so affected. My student agreed, and so it will be Rahner

next semester, not Tillich.

A third item, and then I am finished with this question of Catholic identity. It is an example with negative, and potentially abrasive, overtones, but it serves the purpose. In the very recent past one of our prestigious divinity schools offered a semester's length lectureship to a self-described "post-Roman Catholic" theologian. The semester tenure was extended to two and, by the same Topsy-like process, a piece of the chair of Roman Catholic studies was thrown in for good measure. The appointment was greeted with no enthusiasm by the Roman Catholic theologians in the area. On the contrary, one or two openly expressed their objections. It was an offensive selection, not because of the academic record or personality of the theologian involved, but because it reflected so casual, and so academically insensitive, an attitude toward the entire Roman Catholic theological tradition.

I hope this convention has helped us all in clarifying and refining our understanding of that tradition and of its impact upon our own theological reflections.

If there is indeed a Roman Catholic way, or Roman Catholic ways, of doing theology which are truly distinctive, then there must be some point to maintaining at least the kind of relatively loose federation of Catholic theologians represented by the CTSA. Catholic theology is as much a corporate as it is an individual enterprise. Which brings us to my seventh and final question: What can we Catholic theologians do together that we cannot do alone? I have six proposals, each of which is connected in some way with one of the preceding six questions.

1. There are still too many serious books and articles which appear each year without more than token acknowledgement from the rest of the theological community. Some of them offer direct challenges to our most widely celebrated assumptions. Gabriel Moran's *The Present Revelation* is a case in point.<sup>14</sup> It is only within the past few months that it has begun to receive the kind of analytical attention it deserves. The quality, and indeed even the intensity, of debate within the theological community may begin to persuade our friendly critics that we do in fact take the central theological questions seriously. And, as a possible by-product, we may also persuade our right-wing detractors that we are prepared to take on one of our own for the sake of theological, not to

<sup>14</sup>(New York: Herder & Herder, 1972).

say doctrinal, clarification. The annual convention provides us with one of our best opportunities for this kind of sustained intramural argument. We have not always taken advantage of the opportunity.

2. Many CTSA members serve on major seminary faculties. In the early days of this Society, this was for all practical purposes an organization of seminary personnel. Can we perhaps agree by now that the vocation crisis is as much a matter of declining quality as it is of declining quantity? Can we also agree that the ominous decline in quality is, in some substantial measure, a product of restrictive policies which are, in turn, based on weakly grounded theological and/or doctrinal principles? I refer specifically to the exclusion of women from the ordained ministry and the requirement of celibacy. Might there not be a moral obligation especially for theologians teaching in major seminaries to speak out together on both of these issues, to insist that these operative restrictions are theologically and doctrinally unnecessary and even unwarranted, and to do this for the sake of a Church which deserves better than it's getting? Here, again, if the younger members of the CTSA have to take the lead, we're back where we started, with a spiraling cycle of interrupted academic development.

3. We should consider issuing joint statements, of a direct and readable quality, not only on such immediate problems as the conditions for ordination to the priesthood but for all major theological questions which have today some urgent pastoral implications, e.g., on the present status of theological scholarship regarding Jesus, on the viability of our hope in the resurrection of the body, on the signs of God's presence within human experience, on our legitimate Christian options regarding marriage, divorce, and remarriage, and so forth. In that widely quoted *Newsweek* survey of three and a half years ago, only 7 per cent of the American Catholic population indicated that they could recall a single decision of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops which has been important in their lives.<sup>15</sup> I do not say this cynically: we cannot do much worse. And we have a ministerial, as well as a professional, responsibility to try and do better. This may elicit from the traditionalist sector familiar charges that the theologians are setting themselves up as a parallel or competing magisterium. So be it.

<sup>15</sup>"Has the Church Lost its Soul?" *Newsweek* 78 (October 4, 1971), 82.

We cannot let the fear of misinterpretation or of misrepresentation deter us from a job that needs doing.

4. Sam Dash, chief counsel for the Senate Watergate Committee, delivered the commencement address this year at Fairfield University in Connecticut. I was struck by one of his proposals. He urged greater use of technology as a method to reform the criminal justice system. Dash said that his was the first investigative committee to use the Library of Congress' computer to record and store testimony of the hearings. By using the computer, the staff was able to re-examine testimony quickly throughout the proceedings and to sort out the facts. Dash indicated that Archibald Cox, the first special prosecutor, and the House subcommittee on impeachment also used the computer.

Computerization is an idea whose time must come eventually for theological research as well. Some day in the distant future scholars may look back upon this century and shake their heads in disbelief at the relatively primitive methods we technologically sophisticated theologians employed in our work. History reveres those medieval monks who, by their care and perseverance, artfully and gracefully copied the ancient texts, letter by letter. But no one is likely to be admired today, in this age of Xerox, for employing the same tedious method of reproduction. The sooner we liberate ourselves from the oppressiveness of unnecessary investigative techniques and labors, the sooner we free ourselves for full-time theological reflection. What the potential theologian requires is not primarily an aptitude for bibliographical exploration but rather the gifts of insight, critical judgment, and decisiveness.

There is simply too much being produced and too little time to assimilate it. And the constriction of time is further complicated by the continuing changes in life-style. Unlike our towering predecessors, we live in a highly mobile society, one indeed that demands movement. We live in a noisy society, one indeed that prevents extended periods of quiet reflection. We live in a society where interpersonal relationships multiply and remultiply, one indeed that makes more and more demands upon an individual set upon doing a particular task in a private way. We live in a society that seems intent upon distracting us, one indeed that largely succeeds in its intention. The day of the *Summa* is over, to be sure, but not necessarily because we lack the faith, or the wisdom, or the intelligence of Aquinas, but because we lack the medie-

val tempo and cultural milieu. I do not complain about it; I merely note it. On the contrary, insight, critical judgment, and decisiveness, supported by the tools of modern technology, should help us outproduce and outpace the medieval and even nineteenth and early twentieth-century theologians.

5. In recognition of our own autonomy as theologians, the CTSA must continue to function according to its own rules, formulated to meet its own needs and to achieve its own special ends, and not according to rules which might prevail elsewhere in the Catholic Church, where different needs and ends predominate. In the spirit of the resolution we adopted at the 1970 convention in Baltimore, in which the CTSA expressed regret regarding the decision of the executive committee of the NCCB to exclude priests who have been dispensed from the obligation of celibacy from serving in a staff or consultative capacity for the NCCB-sponsored projects, we must continue to select the best theologians available not only for work on our various study committees but also for service on our board of directors and in our major offices—without concern over the candidate's prior or present canonical status.<sup>16</sup>

6. Finally, we must demand from our Roman Catholic doctoral, masters-level, and seminary students a critical and comprehensive assimilation of the principal elements of that tradition—in an ecumenical mode, to be sure. What appears to be a general qualitative decline should be of concern to us all, whether inside or outside major seminary faculties. Why is it, New Testament scholar Richard Dillon has sharply asked, that “suddenly, in the laicization process, the church adopts a policy of stern scrutiny such as was never enforced in the priest's recruitment and formation! The high ideals of priestly formation set forth in the encyclicals and curial instructions stand in ludicrous contrast to the practice of most seminaries, where a shortage of numbers dictates the collapse of standards and an uneducated, undisciplined clergy emerges to minister to an increasingly impatient laity.”<sup>17</sup> And what we demand from our students, we should, of course, demand from one another. Conventions such as this are success-

<sup>16</sup>CTSA Proceedings 26 (1971), 256.

<sup>17</sup>“Biblical Approaches to the Priesthood,” *Worship* 46 (1972), 470.

ful only to the extent that they inspire us to elevate our standards and maintain them with renewed resolve. There is never any viable substitute for quality. May it not elude our individual and corporate grasps.

RICHARD P. MCBRIEN  
*Boston College*