

APPENDIX A

ADDRESS OF WELCOME

I take this occasion to welcome you to the Archdiocese. We are honored by your presence. I hope that your stay here will be pleasant and fruitful. If there is anything I can do to be of assistance to you, please do not hesitate to call on me.

I am delighted that you are focusing your attention in this convention on the local church. By local church I understand the diocese, the community of believers in a particular locality gathered around its bishop. I am confident, of course, that your reflections will also focus on the church in a particular region or nation. One of the key structures emphasized by Vatican II is the national or regional episcopal conference which provides an instrument for common reflection and action for the local churches in a given area.

The reason I am pleased you have chosen this topic is that I believe the vitality of the local church is the key to the present and future well-being of the Church as a whole. In the final analysis, the local church is where the action is. The local church is surely dependent on the universal Church for its life and vitality. Like a branch cut off from its vine, the local church would wither and ultimately die if it did not remain in communion with the universal Church. Still, the strength of the universal Church is very much related to and dependent on the strength of the local community of believers which seeks to follow Christ and to incarnate in its life the values of his gospel.

The key ecclesiological documents, of course, are *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes* of the II Vatican Council. These provide complementary views of what it means to be the Church in the world today. *Lumen gentium* describes the structure and substance of the Church; *Gaudium et spes* describes the setting in which the Church of the Incarnate Word becomes incarnate in history. Any discussion of what the Church should be must consider both the Church in itself and the Church in its relationship to the world. Such a discussion must also reflect on how the local church and the universal Church relate to each other: e.g., how the universal Church, under the leadership of the Holy Father, ensures our continuity with our apostolic tradition; how the local church carries out the ministry of the universal Church in a particular

geographical and cultural context; how the local church contributes—out of its own life and experience—to the richness and the growing pastoral consciousness of the universal Church, and vice versa. A number of papal documents subsequent to the Council have brought into even clearer focus the Church's task of giving expression, at both the universal and local levels, to the teaching of the Gospel in diverse cultural, social and geographic situations. I am thinking, for example, of such documents as Pope Paul VI's *Octagesima adveniens* and *Evangelii nuntiandi* and Pope John Paul II's *Redemptor hominis*.

My purpose in making these remarks is not to lecture you on how you should go about your ecclesiological research and reflection. You are fully capable of doing that without my assistance. Rather, I wish to make an appeal as a pastor of a local church.

Those of us who are pastors need your help, as theologians and experts in related sciences, in addressing many of our contemporary pastoral concerns. You must be prepared to relate, in a very direct way, your theological insights to the problems, challenges, and bewilderment of daily living which comprise the agenda of our ministry. I am convinced that a serious difficulty today is the fact that much of our Catholic teaching and discipline has become disconnected, in the minds of many people, from the objective realities from which they flow and which give them their meaning. The underlying philosophy or view of life which gives the Christian message its uniqueness, as well as the categories we use to communicate that message, is lost on many people because it is perceived as being so different from their experience and so different from the secular and material values with which they are bombarded each day by the media. What is needed in this situation, I am convinced, is a new synthesis of Christian teaching which will be understandable, credible and, indeed, appealing to the people of today.

What do I recommend? In terms of general suggestions, I will repeat an appeal I made over five years ago at a symposium on theology and the magisterium held at Notre Dame. At that time, I said that if our evangelizing efforts are to make a greater impact, two things are necessary.

First, there must be a renewal of Christian ethics. By this I mean the need to combine the best of the "old" approach to morality (its recognition of moral absolutes, its insistence on the need for moral norms, its delineation of definite content for charity) with the best of the "new" approach (its insistence on the importance of the person, the context of action, and the primacy of charity in Christian moral living). Such a synthesis must be more

than a patchwork of ethical theories. It involves nothing less than a rigorous rethinking of moral theology and the development of an integral Christian ethic which, while incorporating the best of the "old" and the "new," is also something greater than the mere sum of its parts.

The second need is the development of a foundational theology, or as some would call it, a new apologetics. There is a growing urgency, I believe, to identify clearly and cogently the reasons for belief without, of course, equating these with faith itself. Faith is much more than merely something to be experienced, perhaps in a quasi-mystical manner, independently of a content of belief to be known and accepted by the intellect. If this latter dimension is not present, people will be cut off from an authentic and important part of their intellectual and cultural heritage. Nothing is more impoverishing than religious illiteracy.

I believe Pope John Paul II in his many writings and talks has moved forward in a significant way in both the renewal of Christian ethics and the development of a foundational theology. We need to take a close look at the direction he has given us in these two areas.

In terms of more specific recommendations, there are many areas of genuine pastoral concern. To illustrate the kinds of pastoral problems I have in mind when I ask for your assistance, I will mention only three. These are given merely by way of example. There are many others which could just as easily have been chosen.

(1) *Sacramental Theology*. Two sacraments that have reached a critical stage in Catholic life are marriage and penance. Relative to marriage, we need among other things to develop a better theology or spirituality of marital intimacy. More specifically, what kind of pastoral strategy can we develop to assist people in dealing with the life and death cycle they experience in marriage? Very little has been written about this. I presented a paper to the 1980 Synod on this topic which has received very positive reactions. I hope there will be a follow-up.

The other sacrament which needs attention is penance or reconciliation. The postconciliar renewal of this sacrament which, in my mind, is so indispensable for conversion and spiritual growth has been less than satisfactory. I am convinced that many people today, including some in leadership positions, do not understand the real nature of this sacrament and what it can do for us, both as individuals and as a community of believers.

(2) *Sexuality*. I need not remind you that our teaching on sexuality is ignored by a substantial percentage of our people. Simply restating our code, as important as that is, is not sufficient.

We need to develop a richer and more positive theology of sexuality, one that will help people see sexuality as a wonderful gift from God, and one which has a tremendous potential for love and life when used according to God's plan. In one of my interventions at the 1980 Synod I spelled out the elements that would be included in such a theology. Pope John Paul II, in his Wednesday audiences, has made a significant contribution in this regard.

(3) *Christology*. One of the most critical theological areas is that of Christology. Our understanding of Jesus will have a tremendous impact on the life of the Church in the future, just as it did in the past. I need not tell you this, of course, because a review of the theological literature of the past few years shows that Christology has been given a high priority by many theologians. But how do we relate all this to the people at the grass roots? What is the significance of the Christ-event for them? The radical demands of Christianity will go unheeded until people know who Christ really is and convert to him.

These are just a few of the topics I had in mind when I spoke about areas of pastoral concern. I am sure that from your own experience you could identify many other topics which have a significant pastoral dimension. The point is that we pastors need your help; we need the insights which you have as a result of your study and research. Though, admittedly, our roles are different, we must continue to work with and support each other as we go about our task of proclaiming the message of the Gospel, as it has been handed on to us by the Church, and relating it to the myriad situations in which people find themselves today. In particular, your own work is enriched and takes on a lasting dimension to the extent that you always keep in mind the larger pastoral needs of the Church and your responsibility for helping to resolve them.

I take this occasion to thank you for what you have done in the past and what you are doing today for the Church. May the Lord bless you as you go about your work which is such a needed and precious gift to the Church

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