

APPENDIX A

ADDRESS OF WELCOME

It is a pleasure for me to welcome you back to New York. Here is where it all began—at a planning session and then at the first convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America at the hotel Commodore in 1946. Once every decade the Society has come back to its birthplace, most often to the Commodore Hotel which unfortunately is no more.

As I welcome you, I rejoice in the essential service that theologians render to the entire Christian community. Theologians help to build up the communion of faith which unites us as members of Christ throughout the entire world. Theologians help us see how our experience is in continuity and consistent with the faith which has been handed on from generation to generation, right from the time of the apostles.

You return to this New York meeting at a time when theology and the prayerful work of theologians are greatly needed. Your efforts are required to probe more deeply into the implications of revealed truth. Your help is needed—perhaps more than ever before—to shed the light of that truth on the events and the life our times. We live in a world that changes ever more rapidly. Information and knowledge expand at such a rate that the expansion is referred to us as an explosion. The peoples of the world are being drawn closer together, and events in one country affect us all, sometimes within a matter of hours.

Your conference takes place at the same time that the member states of the United Nations have gathered in New York for the second Session on Disarmament. This circumstance is, I think, providential for it gives all of you as theologians the opportunity to pray and to work together for peace.

There is a growing awareness that we are brothers and sisters in a world which possesses weapons of massive destruction and which faces the risk of witnessing in our lifetime the very end of human history. With you, with thousands who have come to New York this week, with millions of people of good will throughout the world, I join in earnest, unremitting prayer for peace in ourselves and among the family of nations.

At this urgent moment of human history, the Church—and the world—needs the sober and the serious reflection of theologians. There is an urgent moral necessity for all of us to work effectively together for peace, and towards mutual and verifiable disarmament.

Those who are expert in these matters welcome the contributions which various specialists, including theologians, can give. Not that most of us are experts on worldly power and the extensive implications of the arms race, but we are indeed experts on the power of God. This is the area of our greatest—and greatly needed expertise. In his many statements about global concerns, Pope John Paul II, as any good theologian, is always careful to acknowledge the limits of the Church's expertise in the fields of politics, economics, and social welfare. But he unequivocally asserts that the Church is expert in humanity. He

clearly proclaims that the power in which the Church is expert is the power of God.

Your President, Father Leo O'Donovan, tells me that your work sessions are all structured around "Power as an issue in theology." The Church must always strive to bear witness to the power of God. This is an obligation which is heightened in our day. As theologians, you work with the bishops and all God's people in the Church to express the power of the Gospel with the freshness and vigor which are appropriate to it. As the Church reaches out to her members and to all who are not yet believers, she acquires new experiences and is faced with new questions. The Church in mission lives on the cutting edge of human development.

Each of you has a great contribution to make to the Church in mission. For we have all been called by God to a universal mission, a mission which excludes no one. We are sent to every person, to every people, to every culture, and told to witness to them the power of God, the same power which raised Jesus from the dead and is active in the believers.

During these days, you will reflect on power and powerlessness. May the Holy Spirit guide you and help you to perceive that the power which we have received from God is meant to enable us to be people of faith, devoted to sharing the Good News of Jesus, to serving each other in our needs, and to working for justice and peace in our world. May the power of the Gospel be proclaimed clearly and convincingly to all peoples, to the very ends of the earth. May the Church in her missionary outreach be able to call on God revealed to us in Christ Jesus.

We, and all people, will know true peace only when we abide in the power of God, a power which is at once exhilarating and quieting, ennobling and humbling, and one which allows us to rejoice in our weakness. This is the Lord's power to his people.

May your convention strengthen you in this power.

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Archbishop of New York