

THE CHURCH IS CUSTODIAN, TRANSMITTER, INTERPRETER OF DOCTRINES OF THE FAITH*

Consider the many great questions concerning the origin of the universe, the meaning of life, the longing to know the destiny of mankind, the religious phenomenon, which seeks to answer these problems, assimilating and transcending what science and philosophy can tell us about them. Then set the Christian fact in the face of these questions, which recognized in their boundless demands we call darkness, but which, confronted with the Christian fact itself, light up and give us a glimpse of their mysterious depths and at the same time of a certain marvellous beauty. Do this and you will feel echoing within you, as if they had been uttered that very moment, the well-known words of John's Gospel: "the light shines in the darkness" (Jn. 1:5). The panorama of the cosmos is lit up as if the sun had risen from the night; things show a delightful order, which can still be explored; and man, almost laughing and trembling with joy, gets to know himself.

He discovers himself as the privileged wayfarer advancing, tiny and supreme, over the world stage. At the same time he is aware that he has the right and the capacity to dominate it, and both the duty and the possibility of transcending it in the fascination of a new relationship that is superior to him — the dialogue with God: a dialogue that opens in this way: "Our Father, who art in heaven...".

It is not a dream, or imagination, or an hallucination. It is simply the first and normal effect of the Gospel, of its light shining on a soul, which has opened to its rays. What do we call this projection of light? It is Revelation. And what is this opening of the soul? It is called faith.

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We learn these stupendous things from that sublime book of theology and mysticism, which is called the catechism, that is, the religious book of fundamental truths. But today this introduction aims at interesting those who hear it in a further question, which we consider of the utmost importance with regard to the ideological condition in which thinking man finds himself on the religious plane. This question is this. Is contact with God, resulting from the Gospel, a moment of a natural evolution of the human spirit, and evolution that still continues, transforming and surpassing itself? Or is it a single, definitive moment, on which we must nourish ourselves endlessly, but always recognizing its essential content as unchangeable?

The answer is clear: it is a single and definitive moment. Revelation is inserted in time, in history, at a precise date, on the occasion of a specific event, and it must be regarded as concluded and complete for us with the death of the Apostles (cfr. Denz.-Sch. 3421). Revelation is a fact, and at the same time a mystery, which did not have its origin in the human spirit, but came from a divine intervention. It has many progressive manifestations, spread out over a long history, the Old Testament; and it culminated in Jesus Christ (cfr. Hebr. 1:1; I Jn. 2-3; Conciliar constitution, *Dei Verbum*, n. 1). Thus for us eventually the Word of God is the Word Incarnate, the historic Christ, who continues to live in the community united with him through faith and the Holy Spirit, in the Church which is his Mystical Body.

This is how things are, beloved Sons; and in this way our doctrine is separated from the errors which have circulated and still crop up in the culture of our times, and which might ruin completely our Christian conception of life and history. Modernism was the characteristic expression of these errors, and it still exists today, under other names (cfr. Decr. *Lamentabili* of St. Pius X, 1907, and his *Encyclical Pascendi*; Denz.-Sch. 3401, ss.). So we can understand why the Catholic Church, in the past and today, has given and gives so much importance to the scrupulous preservation of the authentic Revelation. She considers it an inviolable treasure, and is sternly aware of her fundamental duty to defend and transmit the doctrine of the faith in unequivocal terms. Orthodoxy is her first concern; the pastoral magisterium her primary and providential function. The apostolic teaching fixed the canons of her preaching. The Apostle Paul's order: "Depositum custodi" (I Tim. 6:20; II Tim. 1:14) is for her such a commitment, that it would be a betrayal to vio-

late it. The teaching Church does not invent her doctrine; she is a witness, a custodian, an interpreter, a transmitter. As regards the truths of the Christian message, she can be called conservative, uncompromising. To those who urge her to make her faith easier, more in keeping with the tastes of the changing mentality of the times, she answers with the Apostles: "Non possumus", we cannot (Acts 4:20).

This too brief lesson does not end here. It still remains to be explained how this original revelation is transmitted through words, study, interpretation, application; that is, how it gives rise to a tradition, which the magisterium of the Church receives and verifies, sometimes with decisive and infallible authority. It should also be recalled how the knowledge of the faith and the teaching that it sets forth, namely theology, can be expressed in different measure, language and form. In other words, a theological "pluralism" is legitimate when it is contained within the limits of the faith and the magisterium entrusted by Christ to the Apostles and their successors.

It would also be necessary to explain that the Word of God, preserved in its authenticity, is not for that reason dry and sterile, but fruitful and alive, and meant to be listened to not merely passively, but to be lived, always renewed and ever embodied in individual souls, in individual communities, in individual Churches, according to human gifts and according to the charisms of the Holy Spirit, which are at the disposal of all those who become faithful disciples of the living and penetrating Word of God (cfr. Hebr. 4:12).

We will speak about this again, perhaps, God willing. But in the meantime may these fragments of Catholic doctrine suffice to make you fervent and happy, and give you food for thought.

With our Apostolic Blessing.