

ITALIAN HIERARCHY ON DOCTRINAL ERRORS*

At its meeting on 26-28 April, the Permanent Council of the Italian Episcopal Conference approved the following two documents, one about the "Declaration on doctrinal errors" and the other about the theses of the "Manifesto of the 33 theologians".

DECLARATION ON DOCTRINAL ERROR

The recent Declaration of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on the divinity of Our Lord Jesus Christ and on the Holy Trinity cannot leave us indifferent. It concerns the two principal mysteries of our faith. If they were taken away or misinterpreted, the whole of Christianity would be nothing but human speculation. It concerns the meaning of our Baptism and of all the Sacraments, because we were baptized "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit", and we are particularly united with the Three divine Persons by grace and by the individual sacraments. It concerns, in a particular way, the Holy Eucharist, because in it we recall the passion and the death and the whole work of salvation of Our Lord Jesus Christ, and we adore His divine Person present in a mysterious way in the consecrated species: if He were not true God, none of us would worship a mere creature, however great.

We give, therefore, a full and convinced adherence of faith to the truths contained in this Declaration, and we invite all the sons of the Church to give their own adherence, of faith, particularly all who have the delicate task of preparing those who will in the future be the proclaimers of the faith, because the Declaration expresses the essential faith and the perennial teaching of the Church.

At the same time we cannot shirk the duty of adding a word of our own to stress its significance and meaning for all Christians, and especially for theologians, whose task it is to help the Bishops in their ministry.

* L'Osservatore Romano, 1 June 1972.

It is a question of real "mysteries". These truths, therefore, can never be completely clarified by our reason. We must consider them true, however, out of the submission of us finite creatures to the infinite intelligence of God, who can neither deceive nor be deceived. Acceptance, in which the essence of Christians' faith consists, certainly contains a sacrifice of our intelligence, of our natural desire to understand everything: a reasonable, necessary and sometimes painful sacrifice, but not for that reason less real, compensated, however, by the fortune and joy of knowing Truths of such value.

This sincere and reasonable acceptance does not dispense us, however, from the duty, equally human and deeply Christian, of illuminating "the mystery" as much as possible. This is what the Church has done in the past, expressing her own global and sometimes implicit faith in more and more clear and specific forms. This is the development of dogma, in which the faith of the whole Church has been greatly helped, and often led, by the work of theologians. This is what the recent Declaration invites Theology to continue to do, for love of the Church and of men. Working on the ground of what the Church has established with certainty, and what the recent Declaration recalled as the definitive meaning of the two "mysteries", theologians will work on solid ground, and will not work in vain.

The field of theology is not limited, however, to probing the "mystery" as much as possible; it is also part of its service, in the general task of the Church with regard to the whole of mankind, to express the perennial doctrine — of yesterday, today and tomorrow — such as divine Revelation is, in language that is more easily understandable for the men of today in order that they, too, may accept it out of faith, keeping its meaning intact.

This is the distinction between the unchangeable content of faith and the form in which it is set forth, to which the famous sentence of Pope John XXIII referred in his Opening Speech to the Council: "The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another. And it is the latter that must be taken into great consideration with patience if necessary, everything being measured in the forms and proportions of a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character".

Theology and the Magisterium of the Church, therefore, have set a pastoral task which is always renewed, and which also the recent Declaration wishes to serve.

Our wish and our hope are that the whole community of the Church, and particularly Pastors and theologians, will carry out this task better and better. This will be a valid help offered to the Church and to men, in order that the Declaration may be not only a document of faith, but also a pastoral service.

MANIFESTO OF 33 THEOLOGIANs

Some recent events, in particular the "Manifesto against resignation in the Church", which we know is not supported by the vast majority of our Clergy and faithful, oblige us to express our thought on a problem that is important for the life of the Church of Christ and for its mission.

Answerable to all, but particularly to the faith, for the custody and correct knowledge and interpretation of the thought of Jesus Christ, we are certain that the visible communion of the whole Italian Episcopate with the successor of Peter and its sincere desire to nourish the lives of the local communities more and more, by adhering to the authentic teaching of Vatican II, will make the Church existing in Italy even more fruitfully responsible towards the Church existing in other regions.

With Vatican II we declare in the first place that the task of continuing Jesus Christ's mission and extending it to all peoples was given not to any community of disciples of the Lord, but to a hierarchical community, in which by the will of Jesus Christ the individual Bishops are the successors of the Apostles and the Episcopal College, in communion with the Roman Pontiff and under his guidance, is the successor of the Apostolic College.

"Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out for Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them . . . Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all the nations; baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you' (Mt. 28, 16, 18-19)".

The relationship between the Bishops and the Episcopal College and the other faithful in the People of God finds its origin and measure in the divine constitution of the Church, willed by Jesus Christ, not in the forms characteristic of the institutions of civil society or in the evolution of times and civilizations. The ways of exercising authority in the Church

may change, therefore; but no reform could ever abolish or diminish the authority peculiar to him who, by divine mandate, represents Jesus Christ, and the rightful and necessary obedience of him who has a different role in the Church, also important, but does not represent Christ the Head of the Church before the faithful.

Every other task must conform to this perennial nature of the Church of Christ, even the important task of theologians, necessary in its own way. And the faithful must be educated to listen to, and follow, the voice of the pastors, who speak authentically in the name of Christ, and not a mere human magisterium. To appeal, therefore, to the faithful and ordinary priests to promote reforms not considered opportune by the legitimate authorities, the Roman Pontiff and the Bishops, means in actual fact to desire a Church different from the one Jesus Christ constituted. This is the gravest judgment we must express on the "Manifesto" of the thirty-three theologians, not going into any subjective judgment about the intention that inspired it.

Furthermore, the individual proposals that are put forward arouse other and equally important motives of perplexity or clear rejection. Leaving to others the task of studying scientifically the proposals put forward, we firmly stress some points:

— a "control of the base" over an authority that has its origin in Jesus Christ, is not acceptable;

— the method of "pressure" cannot be accepted in the Church where charity must reign in order that Jesus Christ may be recognized and loved by everyone;

— judgment about opportuneness of keeping in the ministry those who have voluntarily abandoned celibacy, cannot be left to any individual community;

— it cannot be the task primarily of any community to judge whether the testimony of priestly celibacy is always opportune in the Latin Church. Since the Church and men need first and foremost ministries who love God, in order that they may really be ministers who love men, the Church has had and will always have the duty of choosing the best ways to promote priestly holiness.

It is painful for us to express these clear reservations of ours; but it is a pastoral duty that we feel before Jesus Christ and the faithful, who are waiting for a word from us, as well as to the whole Church and to the Roman Pontiff, with whom the Italian Episcopate wishes to live in full communion.