



APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION

to all the Bishops in peace and communion with the Apostolic See, on the fifth anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council

Beloved brothers,
health and our Apostolic Blessing.

IT IS now five years since, after intense working sessions lived in prayer, study and fraternal exchange of thought and opinion, the bishops of the whole world returned to their dioceses, resolved to ensure "that nothing would block the great river whose streams of heavenly graces today 'refresh the city of God'¹ and that there would be no lessening of the vital spirit which the Church now possesses".²

Thanking God for the work accomplished, each bishop took back with him from the Council not only the experience he had had of collegiality, but also the doctrinal and pastoral texts which had been painstakingly perfected. These texts were spiritual riches to be shared with our co-workers in the priesthood, with the religious and with all the members of the People of God. They were sure guides for proclaiming the word of God to our age and for internally renewing the Christian communities.

That fervour has known no slackening. The successors of the apostles have worked unreservedly to apply the teaching and directives of the Council to the Church's life, each of them where the Holy Spirit has placed him to feed the Church of God,³ and all of them together

¹ *Pf* 45: 5.

² Apostolic Exhortation *Postrema Sessio*, 4 November 1965, in *AAS* 57, 1965, p. 867.

³ *Acts* 20: 28.

in many ways, but especially in the episcopal conferences and synods of bishops. In accordance with the hope expressed in our first encyclical "Ecclesiam Suam"⁴ the council deepened the Church's awareness of herself. It shed more light on the demands of her apostolic mission in the world of today. It helped her to engage in the dialogue of salvation with genuinely ecumenical and missionary spirit.

I

But it is not our intention here to try to draw up a balance sheet of the researches, undertaking and reforms, which have been so numerous since the Council ended. Devoting our attention to reading the signs of the times, *we would like, in a fraternal spirit, to make together with you an examination of our fidelity to the commitment we bishops undertook in our message to humanity at the beginning of the Council: "We shall take pains so to present to the men of this age God's truth in its integrity and purity that they may understand it and gladly assent to it".*⁵

This commitment was made unambiguously clear by the pastoral constitution "Gaudium et Spes", truly the Council's character of the presence of the Church in the world: "The Church of Christ takes her stand in the midst of the anxieties of this age, and does not cease to hope with the utmost confidence. She intends to propose to our age over and over again, in season and out of season, the apostolic message."⁶

It is of course true that the shepherds of the Church have always had this duty of handing on the faith in its fulness and in a manner suited to men of their time. *That means trying to use a language easily accessible to them, answering their questions, arousing their interest and helping them to discover, through poor human speech, the whole message of salvation brought to us by Jesus Christ.* It is in fact the episcopal college which, with Peter and under his authority, guarantees

⁴ AAS 56, 1964, pp. 609-659.

⁵ 20 October 1962, AAS 54, 1962, p. 822.

⁶ 82; AAS 58, 1966, pp. 1106-1107.

the authentic handing on the deposit of faith, and for that purpose it has received, as Saint Irenaeus expressed it, "a sure charism of truth".⁷ The faithfulness of its witness, rooted in Sacred Tradition and Holy Scripture and nourished by the ecclesial life of the whole People of God is what empowers the Church, through the unfailing assistance of the Holy Spirit, to teach without ceasing the word of God and to make it progressively unfold.

Nevertheless, the present position of the faith demands of us an increased effort in order that this word may reach our contemporaries in its fulness and that the works performed by God may be presented to them without falsification and with all the intensity of the love of the truth which can save them? In fact, at the very moment when—the reading of God's word in the liturgy is enjoying a wonderful renewal, thanks to the Council; when use of the Bible is spreading among the Christian people; when advances in catechesis, pursued in accordance with the Council's guidelines, are making possible an evangelization in depth; when biblical, patristic and theological research often makes a precious contribution to a more meaningful expression of the data of revelation—at *this very moment many of the faithful are troubled in their faith by an accumulation of ambiguities, uncertainties and doubts about its essentials*. Such are the Trinitarian and Christological dogmas, the mystery of the Eucharist and the Real Presence, the Church as the institution of salvation, the priestly ministry in the minds of the People of God, the value of prayer and the sacraments, and the moral requirements concerning, for instance, the indissolubility of marriage or respect for life. Even the divine authority of Scripture is not left unquestioned by a *radical demythologization*.

While silence gradually obscures certain fundamental mysteries of Christianity, *we see manifestations of a tendency to reconstruct from psychological and sociological data a Christianity cut off from the unbroken Tradition which links it to the faith of the apostles, and a tendency to extol a Christian life deprived of religious elements*.

⁷ *Adversus Haereses* IV, 26: 2; PG 7, 1053.

⁸ Cf. 2 Th. 2: 10.

All of us, therefore, who through the laying on of hands have received the responsibility of keeping pure and entire the faith entrusted to us and the mission of proclaiming the Gospel unceasingly, are called upon to witness to the obedience we all give the Lord. *It is an inalienable and sacred right of the people in our charge to receive the word of God, the whole word of God, of which the Church has not ceased to acquire deeper comprehension. It is a grave and urgent duty for us to proclaim it untiringly, that the people may grow in faith and understanding of the Christian message and may bear witness throughout their lives to salvation in Jesus Christ.*

The Council reminded us forcefully of this: "Among the principal duties of bishops, the *preaching of the Gospel occupies an eminent place. For bishops are preachers of the faith who lead new disciples to Christ. They are authentic teachers, that is, teachers endowed with the authority of Christ who preach to the people committed to them the faith they must believe and put into practice. By the light of the Holy Spirit, they make that faith clear, bringing forth from the treasury of revelation new things and old,⁹ making faith bear fruit and vigilantly warding off any errors which threaten their flock.¹⁰ Bishops, teaching in communion with the Roman Pontiff, are to be respected by all as witnesses to divine and Catholic truth. In matters of faith and morals, the bishops speak in the name of Christ and the faithful are to accept their teaching and adhere to it with a religious assent..."¹¹*

Certainly, faith is always an assent given because of the authority of God himself. But *the teaching office of the bishops is for the believer the sign and channel which enable him to receive and recognize the word of God.* Each bishop, in his diocese, is united by his office with the episcopal college which, in succession to the apostolic college, has been entrusted with the charge of watching over the purity of faith and the unity of the Church.

⁹ Cf. *Mt.* 13: 52.

¹⁰ Cf. *2 Tim* 4: 1-4.

¹¹ Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Genium*, 25; *AAS* 57, 1965, pp. 29-30.

II

Let us unhesitatingly recognize that in the present circumstances the urgently needed fulfilment of this preeminent task encounters more difficulties than it has known in past centuries.

In fact, while the exercise of the episcopal teaching office was relatively easy when the Church lived in close association with contemporary society, inspiring its culture and sharing its modes of expression, nowadays a serious effort is required of us to ensure that the teaching of the faith should keep the fulness of its meaning and scope, while expressing itself in a form which allows it to reach the spirit and the heart of all men, to whom it is addressed. No one has better shown the duty laid upon us in this regard than our predecessor Pope John XXIII in his discourse at the opening of the Council: "In response to the deep desire of all who are sincerely attached to what is Christian, Catholic and apostolic, this teaching must be more widely and more deeply known, and minds must be more fully permeated and shaped by it. *While this sure and unchangeable teaching must command faithful respect, it should be studied and presented in a way demanded by our age.* The deposit of faith itself—that is to say the truths contained in our venerable teaching—is one thing; the way in which these truths are presented is another, although they must keep the same sense and signification. The manner of presentation is to be regarded as of great importance and if necessary patient work must be devoted to perfecting it. In other works there must be introduced methods of presentation more in keeping with a magisterium which is predominantly pastoral in character."¹²

In the present crisis of language and thought, each bishop in his diocese, each synod and each episcopal conference must be attentive lest this necessary effort should ever betray the truth and continuity of the teaching of the faith. We must beware, in particular, lest an arbitrary selection should reduce God's design to the limits of our human views and restrict the proclaiming of his word to what our ears like to hear, excluding on purely natural criteria what does not please contemporary

¹² AAS 54, 1962, p. 792.

taste. "If anyone", Saint Paul warns us, "preaches a version of the Good News different from the one we have already preached to you, whether it be ourselves or an angel from heaven, he is to be condemned".¹³

In fact *it is not we who are judges of the word of God. It is his word which judges us and exposes our habit of conforming to this world.* "The weakness and insufficiency of Christians, even of those who have the function of preaching, will never be a reason for the Church to water down the absolute nature of the word. The edge of the sword¹⁴ can never be dulled thereby. The Church can never speak otherwise than as Christ did of holiness, virginity, poverty and obedience".¹⁵

In passing, let us remember this: if *sociological surveys* are useful for better discovering the thought patterns of the people of a particular place, the anxieties and needs of those to whom we proclaim the word of God, and also the opposition made to it by modern reasoning through the widespread notion that outside science there exists no legitimate form of knowledge, still *the conclusions drawn from such surveys could not of themselves constitute a determining criterion of truth.*

All the same, we must not be deaf to the questions which today face a believer rightly anxious to acquire a more profound understanding of his faith. We must lend an ear to these questions, not in order to cast suspicion on what is well-founded, nor to deny their postulates, but so that we may do justice to their legitimate demands within our own proper field which is that of faith. This holds true for modern man's great questions concerning his origins, the meaning of life, the happiness to which he aspires and the destiny of the human family. But it is no less true of the questions posed today by scholars, historians, psychologists and sociologists; these questions are so many invitations to us to proclaim better, in its incarnate transcendence, the

¹³ Gal 1: 8.

¹⁴ Heb 4: 12; Rev. 1: 16; 2: 16.

¹⁵ HANS URS VON BALTHASAR, *Das Ganze im Fragment*, Einsiedeln, Benziger 1963, p. 296.

Good News of Christ the Saviour, a message which in no way contradicts the discoveries of the human mind but which rather raises that mind to the level of divine realities, to the point of allowing it to share, in a still inarticulate and incipient yet very real way, in that mystery of love which the Apostle tells us "is beyond all knowledge".¹⁰

To those in the Church who undertake the responsible task of studying more deeply the unfathomable riches of this mystery, namely theologians and in particular exegetes, we shall manifest encouragement and support in order to help them to pursue their work in fidelity to the great stream of Christian Tradition.¹⁷ In the recent past it has quite rightly been said: *Theology, being the science of the faith, can only find its norm in the Church, the community of the believers. When theology rejects its postulates and understands its norm in a different way, it loses its basis and its object. The religious freedom affirmed by the Council and which rests upon freedom of conscience is valid for the personal decision in relation to faith, but it has nothing to do with determining the content and scope of divine revelation*".¹⁸ In like manner, the utilization of human scientific knowledge in research is hermeneutics is a way of investigating the revealed data, but these data cannot be reduced to the analyses thus provided, because they transcend them both in origin and content.

In this period which follows a Council which was prepared by the rich attainments of biblical and theological knowledge, a considerable amount of work remains to be done, particularly in the field of developing the theology of the Church and working out a Christian anthropology taking into account progress made in human sciences and the questions the latter pose to the mind of the believer. We all recognize, not only how important this work is, but also that it makes particular demands; we understand the inevitable waverings. *But in*

¹⁰ Eph 3: 19.

¹⁷ Cf. *Relatio Commissionis in Synodo Episcoporum Constitutae*, Rome, October 1967, pp. 10-11.

¹⁸ *Declaration of the German Bishops*, Fulda, 27 December 1968, in *Herder Korrespondenz*, Freiburg im Breisgau, January 1969, p. 75.

face of the ravages being inflicted upon the Christian people by the diffusion of venturesome hypotheses and of opinions that disturb faith, we have the duty to recall, with the Council, that true theology "rests upon the written word of God, together with sacred Tradition, as its perpetual foundation".¹⁹

Dearly beloved brothers, let us not be reduced to silence for fear of criticism, which is always possible and may at times be well-founded. However necessary the function of theologians, it is not to the learned that God has confided the duty of authentically interpreting the faith of the Church: that faith is borne by the life of the people whose bishops are responsible for them before God. It is for the bishops to tell the people what God asks them to believe.

This demands much courage of each one of us; for, even though we are assisted by exercising this responsibility in community, within the framework of the synods of bishops and the episcopal conferences, it is nonetheless a question of a personal and absolutely inalienable responsibility for us to meet the immediate daily needs of the People of God. This is not the time to ask ourselves as some would have us do, whether it is really useful, opportune and necessary to speak; rather it is the time for us to take the means to make ourselves heard. For it is to us bishops that Saint Paul's exhortation to Timothy is addressed: "Before God and before Christ Jesus who is to be judge of the living and the dead, I put this duty to you, in the name of his Appearing and of his kingdom: proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience — but do all with patience and with the intention of teaching. The time is sure to come when, far from being content with sound teaching, people will be avid for the latest novelty and collect themselves a whole series of teachers according to their own tastes; and then, instead of listening to the truth, they will turn to myths. Be careful always to choose the right course; be brave under trials; make the preaching of the Good News your life's work, in thoroughgoing service".²⁰

¹⁹ Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, 24; *AAS* 58, 1966, p. 828.

²⁰ 2 *Tim* 4: 1-5.

III

Therefore, dearly beloved brothers, *let each of us examine himself on the way in which he carries out this sacred duty: it demands from us assiduous study of the revealed word and constant attention to the life of men.*

How in fact shall we be able to proclaim fruitfully the word of God, if it is not familiar to us through being the subject of our daily meditation and prayer? And how can it be received unless it is supported by a life of deep faith, active charity, total obedience, fervent prayer and humble penance? Having insisted, as is our duty, on teaching the doctrine of the faith, we must add that what is often most needed is not so much an abundance of words as *speech in harmony with a more evangelical life. Yes, it is the witness of saints that the world needs, for, as the Council reminds us, God "speaks to us in them, and gives us a sign of his kingdom, to which we are powerfully drawn".*²¹

*Let us be attentive to the questions that are expressed through the life of men, especially of the young: "What father among you", Jesus says to us, "would hand his son a stone when he ask for bread?".*²² Let us listen willingly to the questionings that come to disturb our peace and quiet. Let us bear patiently the hesitations of those who are groping for the light. Let us know how to walk in brotherly friendship with all those who, lacking the light we ourselves enjoy, are nevertheless seeking through the mists of doubt to reach their Father's house. But, *if we share in their distress, let it be in order to try to heal it. If we hold up to them Christ Jesus, let it be as the Son of God made man to save us and to make us sharers in his life and not as a merely human figure, however wonderful and attractive.*²³

In being thus faithful to God and to the men to whom he sends us, we shall then be able, with prudence and tact, but also with clear

²¹ Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* 50; AAS 57, 1965, p. 56.

²² *Lk* 11: 11.

²³ Cf. 2 *Jn* 7-9.

vision and firmness, to make a correct assessment of opinions. This is, beyond any doubt, one of the most difficult tasks for the episcopate, but also one of the most necessary today. In fact, in the clash of conflicting ideas, the greatest generosity runs the risk of going hand-in-hand with the most questionable statements. "Even from your own ranks", as in the time of Saint Paul, "there will be men coming forward with a travesty of the truth on their lips to induce the disciples to follow them";²⁴ and those who speak in this way are often convinced of doing so in the name of God, deluding themselves about the spirit that animates them. In the matter of discerning the word of faith, do we take sufficient note of the fruits that it brings? Could God be the source of a word that would make Christians lose the sense of evangelical self-denial or which would proclaim justice while forgetting to be the herald of meekness, mercy and purity? Could God be the source of a word which would set brothers against brothers? Jesus warns us of this: "You will be able to tell them by their fruits".²⁵

Let us demand the same from those co-workers who share with us the task of proclaiming the word of God. Let their witness always be that of the Gospel; let their word always be that of the Word who stirs up faith and, together with faith, love of our brothers, bringing all the disciples of Christ to imbue with his spirit the mentality, the manners and the life of the terrestrial city.²⁶ It is in this way that, to quote the admirable expression of Saint Augustine, "God, not men, brought you this; thus even through the ministry of timid men God speaks in full freedom".²⁷

Dearly beloved brothers, these are some of the thoughts suggested to us by the anniversary of the Council, that "providential instrument for the true renewal of the Church".²⁸ In joining with you in all fraternal simplicity to examine our fidelity to this fundamental mis-

²⁴ Acts 20: 30.

²⁵ Mt 7: 15-20.

²⁶ Cf. Decree *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 7, 13, 24; AAS 58, 1966, pp. 843-844, 849-850, 856-857.

²⁷ *Enarratio in Psalmos*, 103; *Sermo*, 1: 19; PL 37, 1351.

²⁸ Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Postrema Sessio*, in AAS 57, 1965, p. 865.

sion of proclaiming the word of God, we have been aware of responding to an imperative duty. Someone perhaps will be surprised, may even protest. In the serenity of our soul we call upon you to witness to the necessity that urges us on to be faithful to our *charge as shepherd*; we call upon you likewise to witness to our desire to join with you taking the means most adapted to our days and at the same time most in conformity with the Council's teaching, the better to ensure its fruitfulness. As we join you in entrusting ourselves to the sweet motherly care of the Virgin Mary, we invoke with all our heart upon you and your pastoral mission the abundant graces of "him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we ask or imagine; glory be to him from generation to generation in the Church and in Christ Jesus for ever and ever. Amen".²⁰

May these wishes be supported by our Apostolic Blessing, which we impart to you with affection.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's on the eight day of December, the solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, in the year nineteen hundred and seventy, the eighth of our pontificate.

PAULUS PP. VI

²⁰ Eph 3: 20-21.

Greetings and Congratulations to:

MOST REV. JESUS VARELA, D.D.
BISHOP OF OZAMIS