

# Seminary Priest Has Some Thoughts on Labels

(Continued from preceding page)

this reason, these formulas are adapted to all men of all times and places."

Father Atwell, in his next paragraph, admits that there are some aberrations, and that such errors should be resisted. To quote him: "Pope John once said the best way these days to fight such errors is by the medicine of mercy and truth. In other words the only real corrective for bad theology is better theology."

I will now give the direct and full quotation of Pope John to which Father Atwell refers: "The Church has always opposed these errors. Frequently she has condemned them with the greatest severity. Nowadays, however, the Spouse of Christ prefers to make use of the medicine of mercy rather than of severity. She considers that she meets the needs of the present day by demonstrating the validity of her teaching rather than by condemnation. Not, certainly, that there is a lack of fallacious concepts, opinions and dangerous concepts to be guarded against and dissipated."

Pope John was not here contrasting a bad theology and a better theology, but rather mercy and severity as an approach to dealing with errors and the erring. He opted for himself, and as a suggestion to the Council, that mercy be emphasized and severity be de-emphasized. And the Council has generously followed out his suggestion, surely as relating to the severity of condemnation.

The mind of the Council on this issue is fairly well summed up in the following quotation from the Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: "This love and good will (towards those who think or act differently than we do in social, political and even religious matters), to be sure, must in no way render us indifferent to truth and goodness. Indeed love itself impels the disciples of Christ to speak the saving truth to all men. But it is necessary to distinguish between error which always merits repudiation and the person in error who never loses the dignity of being a person even when he is flawed by false or inadequate notions."

One wonders whether, if Pope John were alive today, he would not be inclined to mingle a little more severity with the mercy. Surely he would repudiate the errors which are spreading.

And this is exactly what his successor, Pope Paul VI, has done and is doing. Even before the Council ended, Pope Paul thought it necessary to issue his Encyclical "Mysterium Fidei" (which he quoted above) in which he spoke in strong terms, condemning errors about the Sacrament and the Eucharist. And anyone who has read his magnificent talks and directives since the conclusion of the Council cannot fail to note that, while setting forth

the rich, positive content of the Council—and always as a benign shepherd, he has, nevertheless, with increasing frequency and seriousness, called attention to and condemned errors and aberrations in the thinking and practice of some Catholics.

I cannot believe that Father Atwell means what he says in his next statement: "All our God-talk is provisional and historically conditioned and, therefore, there is seldom, if ever, a real out-and-out heretic within the Church anymore."

This seems to say that (since words express concepts) the Church's thinking, its theology, about God in past centuries and also now, is provisional and historically conditioned, and so in the ebb and flow of the uncertainty of theological language it is very hard to pin down a real heresy. Therefore there is seldom, if ever, a real out-and-out heretic within the Church anymore. Such reasoning, (and if it is not meant, then the wording which gives semblance to it) is demonstrated as false, not only by the quotation which we gave above from Pope Paul's Encyclical, but also by the doctrine of the stability and continuity of the Deposit of Faith which the Church must preach and teach unerringly to every generation.

I disagree with Father Atwell's remark that most of us have been probably tinged or infected with heresy. It is my own opinion that most of us have not been, probably tinged or infected with heresy. It is my own opinion that most Catholics who have been instructed in the faith, bringing prayer and humility to the God-given gift of "sensus fidelium" (thinking and feeling with the Church) steer clear fairly easily of heresy. In any case the example of "a normal physique ultimately being the best medicine for a cold in the head" is hardly an apt analogy for a similar remedy in heresy-infection. For this far an effective remedy for the common cold has not been found (though it may be found in the future and then any sensible person would be quick to use it), whereas Christ gave a specific remedy for heresy-infection from the very beginning, i.e. detection and repudiation of the heresy or error by substituting in its place the true doctrine of Christ's Catholic Church.

Father Atwell thinks that heresy trials are obsolete. If they are obsolete it is not for the reasons which Father Atwell gives. To say that every heresy trial has been cruel is to fly in the face of historical fact. And to say that a heresy trial is ineffective is a purely arbitrary statement. I feel sure that any Catholic who might be accused unjustly of heresy would welcome the opportunity of having his case presented clearly before competent judges. And the result would be beneficial not only to him but to many others.

Since the last mentioned trial in the editorial is some-

what personal, perhaps I should not comment on it. But since my knowledge of it, like that of thousands of others in the diocese, is gleaned from Father Atwell's public airing of it, I think that in all fairness, the merits of the parties being cited, it should also be stated that Father James Malley of Hilton is a theologian that he was a very fine student in the Seminary, that he has a special mandate to teach, and therefore he is in a good position to judge about Christ's truth and about statements which might be opposed to it.

Finally it is rather puzzling to say the least, to see Father Atwell, after he has just spoken out so strongly against heresy trials, presenting us with another kind of trial of his own in which, as chief justice, he pronounces a sentence which the context of his editorial leads us to construe as some form of "cruelty" of which Father Malley is guilty.

I would conclude by saying to Father Atwell that it is time that we all closed ranks behind Christ's Vicar in Rome who is the supreme, and if we read all of his talk and pronouncements, the clear guide in the midst of

so much error and confusion all about us. It is time to remember that our enemy is not flesh and blood, but the evil spirits of falsehood, deceit, and perversion, all the more dangerous and insidious because they are unseen.

As Bishop Sheen has said of their Leader: "The essence of the devil is the lie and he defines himself as 'I am who am not.'" To detect his presence to ward-off his lies and attacks we need divine light and divine help. The help we find humbly in the merciful grace of God; the light in the abundant, sure, and clear teachings of the successors of St. Peter the Rock.

As an example of such light and as a fitting conclusion to the points I have tried to make, I would quote the following excerpts of Pope Paul VI from another recent Encyclical on the Church (Ecclesiam Suam): "Our Lord's exhortation to vigilance is equally applicable to things which may be of more immediate concern to us (than the end of the world), the dangers and temptations which threaten to corrupt men's moral lives and turn men away from

the right path of truth. Obviously, there can be no question of reforming the essential nature of the Church or its basic and necessary structure. To use the word 'reform' in that context would be to misuse it completely. — Therefore, when we speak about reform we are not concerned to change things, but to preserve all the more resolutely the characteristic features which Christ has impressed on His Church. Or rather, we are concerned to restore to the Church that ideal of perfection and beauty that corresponds to its original image. — Some imagine that the only genuine renewal of the Church is one which is born from the ideas of a few, admittedly zealous, people who, not infrequently, consider themselves divinely inspired. Their vain dreams of the wrong sort of renewal could easily defile the very shape which the Church ought to have. — Conformity to the spirit of the world, the rejection of the rules of Christian asceticism, indifference in the face of the laxity of contemporary morals, emancipation from the authority of wise and laudful superiors, apathy concerning the contra-

dictory forms of modern thought, these are not the things that can give vigor to the Church and fit it to receive the power and strength of the Holy Spirit's gifts. These are not the things which strengthen the Church in its true following of Christ. They neither inject into the Church the watchful spirit of brotherly love, nor do they increase its ability to communicate its message. The only things which can bring these blessings on the Church are the following: the determination to live in accordance with divine grace, faithfulness to the Gospel of Christ, unity in the ranks of the sacred hierarchy and among Christian communities."

## Council's 'Greatest Achievement'

# Re-orientation of Theology

St. Paul — (RNS) — A leading Roman Catholic liturgist stated here that a re-orientation of theology "very likely is the greatest achievement of Vatican II."

Benedictine Father Godfrey Diekmann, editor of Worship magazine, made this statement during a lecture series on the Second Vatican Council sponsored here by the College of St. Thomas. Father Diekmann served as a consultant of the Preparatory Commission on the Liturgy for the Council. He also served as a peritus (expert) for the Council.

Father Diekmann said that Chapter I of the Constitution of the Liturgy "undoubtedly constitutes an historic breakthrough."

"THE FIRST thing we have to be clear about," he said, "is that the Constitution of the Liturgy is not just about ritual reforms, about the use of vernacular, about the altar facing the people, although these have received the most publicity."

"Most important of this document is Chapter I on the theological principles involved. It initiated that re-orientation

of theology which very likely is the greatest achievement of Vatican II."

Father Diekmann referred to a quotation from Tolstoy: "When a savage ceases to believe in his wooden god, this does not mean that there is no God, but only that the true God is not of wood."

"In our case," the liturgist stated, "it is obviously not a question of a 'wooden God,' but of a one-sided emphasis through many centuries of the transcendent, the infinitely distant and remote God in Heaven. What the Constitution of the Sacred Liturgy in Chap-

ter I has done is to help us to re-discover the meaning of the imminent God, the Emmanuel, the God with us, the God who not only directs human affairs from the heights of heaven, but who in Christ has come to earth permanently, has identified himself with the world and with men."

He stated that due to the emphasis on God and Christ too largely "up there," man today is experiencing a swing of the pendulum: "a neglect, a questioning of the very existence of this obscure and distant God, and a one-sided and exclusive concentration on man here below. History is re-vengeing itself."

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