

Pontiff Lauds Theological Commission

My venerated predecessor Pope Paul VI founded the International Theological Commission in the year 1969 after the Fathers of the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops had two years previously expressed a desire that this should be done.

The duty of the commission is "to assist the Holy See and, in a special way, the Sacred Congregation (for the Doctrine of the Faith) in examining doctrinal questions of greater importance."



In the two five-year periods which have passed, the theological commission has fulfilled this task happily and usefully in many different ways. This is well known from the many documents which have been issued so far.

I know that it has been of great assistance not only to the Roman Pontiff, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and the other departments of the Roman Curia but also to the episcopal conferences and for the advancement of theology.

This service has been entirely necessary in these difficult times when new questions and different opinions have arisen about them and it has helped to nourish and strengthen the one faith in the one Church. For this reason the work of the theological commission always increases and I repeat what I said in my address Oct. 26, 1979, to those taking part then in the commission; namely: "We strongly approve of it, we attach great importance to it and we expect much from it."

In this office you must greatly assist and benefit the good and fruitful relations between the magisterium and theology. Therefore, allow me to recall what I said Nov. 18 of last year to the professors of sacred theology in Altötting when I was making my pastoral visits in Germany: "Theology is a science with all the possibilities of human perception. It is free in the application of methods and analyses. Nevertheless, theologians must see where they stand in relation to the faith of the Church. The credit for our faith goes not to ourselves; indeed it is 'built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.' Theologians, too, must take faith as the basis. They can throw light on it but they cannot produce it... Love for the physical Church, which also includes belief in the testimony of faith and the Magisterium of the Church, does not estrange the theologian from his work and does not deprive that work of any of its indispensable self-reliance. The magisterium and theology have two different tasks to perform. That is why neither can be reduced to the other. Yet they serve the whole. Precisely on account of this configuration they must remain in constant consultation with one another."

This applies especially to the work of the International Theological Commission which so clearly shares the anxieties of the Supreme Pastor of the Church, of the Roman Curia and of the bishops throughout the world.

I know that in this plenary session you have again examined a number of questions on Christology. In the previous session, the International Theological Commission issued an excellent document which has been useful for passing a critical judgment on modern disputes and for deepening the understanding of the Church's faith, and I hope that the continuation of this work will bear fruit worthy of the studies thus far carried out by the commission.

In this matter I have very much at heart three concepts which I want to mention to you briefly.

A) Jesus Christ is the image of God and in Him were created all things in heaven and on earth. In the face of Christ shines the splendor of the invisible God the Father. This Jesus Christ is more than a prophet. He has an exclusive communion with the Father. Then we are only redeemed if Jesus Christ can in His own person fully communicate the divine life. Thus we believe in the Son of God, "God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, one in substance with the Father, through Him all things were made."

In this profession of faith the essence of the Christian religion consists.

B) This Christian faith depends on the New Testament and on the living Tradition of the Church as it is revealed in the ecumenical councils of the early centuries. The celebration of the First Council of Constantinople this year reminds us of those who were true Christians united in the bond of Scripture and in this "Consensus of the first five centuries," as they say.

The work of theology should be a help to that patrimony and to the heritage of the early Church more than in the past. Don't ignore this spiritual force in modern discussions, especially in the ecumenical ones. The many statements and so many experiences in the course of this reflection with separated Christians has given great hope of greater unity.

C) Christological reflection, in the ultimate analysis, gives praise to the triune God and gives thanks for His

infinite goodness, but it also, has an anthropological significance. I refer to the excellent and well-known statement in the Pastoral Constitution Gaudium et Spes. "Christ the final Adam... fully reveals man to man himself and makes His supreme calling clear."

I tried to explain this concept in the encyclical Letters Redemptor Hominis and Dives in Misericordia in accordance with the anxieties and longings of men. In this field great work lies buried for modern theology.

Therefore, I was glad when I heard that next time you want to make a start on the subject of "the dignity of the human person."

Notice the close connection between your programs of study.

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