

origins

CNS documentary service

Theology Today: Perspectives, Principles and Criteria

International Theological Commission

Theologians and bishops have complementary roles in furthering understanding of the Catholic faith, but the former must ultimately defer to the latter on questions of definitive interpretation, according to a new report from a Vatican panel of theological advisers. The report from the International Theological Commission, a group of theologians appointed by Pope Benedict XVI to study themes of current interest and offer expert advice to the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, is based on dis-

“When it comes to the ‘authentic’ interpretation of the faith, the magisterium plays a role that theology simply cannot take to itself.”

cussions held in Rome over the period 2004-2011. The report acknowledges an inevitable tension, while emphasizing a need for harmony, between the practice of theology and the exercise by the pope and bishops of the magisterium, the church's teaching authority in matters of faith and morals. “Bishops and theologians have distinct callings and must respect one another's particular competence, lest the magisterium reduce theology to a mere repetitive science or theologians presume to substitute the teaching office of the church's pastors,” the theologians write. “Theology investigates and articulates the faith of the church, and the ecclesiastical magisterium proclaims that faith and authentically interprets it,” the report says. In their pronouncements, bishops should draw on the work of theologians in order to demonstrate a “capacity for critical evaluation,” among other virtues, the report advises. “On the other hand, the magisterium is an indispensable help to theology by its authentic transmission of the deposit of faith (*depositum fidei*), particularly at decisive times of discernment,” the authors add. The report was approved for publication by Cardinal William J. Levada, prefect of the doctrinal congregation. Its appearance here in *Origins* marks its first publication in English.

Preliminary Note

the study of the theme of the status of theology was already begun by the International Theological Commission in the quinquennial

continued on page 642



contents

- 641 Theology Today:
Perspectives, Principles
and Criteria
*by the International
Theological Commission*
- 661 Update to Bishops on
Contraceptive Mandate
*by Cardinal Timothy M.
Dolan*
- 664 Datebook
- 664 On File

March 15, 2012
Volume 41
Number 40

Pope Benedict XVI delivered the following address Dec. 2, 2011, to the International Theological Commission during its plenary meeting at the Vatican:

"It is a great joy for me to be able to receive you at the close of the annual plenary meeting of the International Theological Commission. I would first like to express a heartfelt thank you for the words that Cardinal William Levada, in his capacity as president of the commission, has addressed to me on behalf of you all.

"The work of this session coincided this year with the first week of Advent, an occasion that reminds us that every theologian is called to be a man of Advent, a witness keeping watch, who enlightens the ways of understanding the Word made flesh. We could say that knowledge of the true God constantly tends toward and is fed by that 'hour,' which is unknown, at which the Lord will return. Thus, keeping vigilant and enlivening the hope of expectation are not secondary tasks for a correct theological thought, which finds its reason in the person of the One who comes to meet us and illumines our understanding of salvation.

"Today I would like to reflect briefly with you on the three themes that the International Theological Commission has been studying in recent years. The first, as has been said, concerns the fundamental question for all theological reflection: the question of God and in particular the understanding of monotheism. From this broad doctrinal horizon you have also delved into an ecclesial theme: the meaning of the social doctrine of the church, paying special attention to a theme that is of great relevance to contemporary theological thought about God: the question of the actual status of theology today, in its perspectives, in its principles and criteria.

"Behind the profession of the Christian faith in the one

continued from page 641

session of 2004-2008. The work was done by a subcommission presided by Father Santiago del Cura Elena and composed of the following members: Archbishop Bruno Forte, Archbishop Savio Hon Tai-Fai, SDB, Fathers Antonio Castellano, SDB, Tomislav Ivancic, Thomas Norris, Paul Rouhana, Leonard Santedi Kinkupu, Jerzy Szymik and Dr. Thomas Söding.

Since, however, this subcommission had no way of completing its work with the publication of a document, the study was taken up in the following quinquennial session on the basis of the work previously undertaken. For this purpose, a new subcommission was formed presided by Msgr. Paul McPartlan and composed of the following members: Bishop Jan Liesen, Fathers Serge Thomas Bonino, OP, Antonio Castellano, SDB, Adelbert Denaux, Tomislav Ivancic, Leonard Santedi Kinkupu, Jerzy Szymik, Sister Sara Butler, MSBT, and Dr. Thomas Söding.

The general discussions of this theme were held in numerous meetings of the subcommission and during the plenary sessions of the same International Theological Commission held in Rome from 2004 to 2011. The present text was approved in *forma specifica* on Nov. 29, 2011, and was then submitted to its president, Cardinal William Levada, prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, who authorized its publication.

Introduction

1. The years following the Second Vatican Council have been extremely productive for Catholic theology. There have been new theological voices, especially those of laymen and women; theologies from new cultural contexts, particularly Latin America, Africa and Asia; new themes for reflection such as peace, justice, liberation, ecology and bioethics; deeper treatments of former themes, thanks to renewal in biblical, liturgical, patristic and medieval studies; and new venues for reflection such as ecumenical, interreligious and intercultural dialogue.

These are fundamentally positive develop-

ments. Catholic theology has sought to follow the path opened by the council, which wished to express its "solidarity and respectful affection for the whole human family" by entering into dialogue with it and offering "the saving resources which the church has received from its founder under the promptings of the Holy Spirit."¹

However, this period has also seen a certain fragmentation of theology, and in the dialogue just mentioned theology always faces the challenge of maintaining its own true identity. The question arises, therefore, as to what characterizes Catholic theology and gives it, in and through its many forms, a clear sense of identity in its engagement with the world of today.

2. To some extent, the church clearly needs a common discourse if it is to communicate the one message of Christ to the world both theologically and pastorally. It is therefore legitimate to speak of the need for a certain unity of theology. However, unity here needs to be carefully understood so as not to be confused with uniformity or a single style.

"The church clearly needs a common discourse if it is to communicate the one message of Christ to the world both theologically and pastorally."

The unity of theology, like that of the church as professed in the creed, must be closely correlated with the idea of catholicity and also with those of holiness and apostolicity.² The church's catholicity derives from Christ himself who is the savior of the whole world and of all humanity (cf. Eph 1:3-10; 1 Tm 2:3-6). The church is therefore at home in every nation and culture, and seeks to "gather in everything for its salvation and sanctification."³

The fact that there is one Savior shows that there is a necessary bond between catholic-

ISSN 0093-609X, Origins, CNS Documentary Service, is published weekly (except biweekly during July, August and December's last week) by Catholic News Service, 3211 4th Street N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100. Copyright © 2012 by Catholic News Service/U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. Periodical-class postage paid at Washington, D.C. Editor, Edmond Brosnan; Associate Editor, Mary Esslinger; Layout, Emily Thompson; Director of CNS, Tony Spence. Editorial: (202) 541-3284. Circulation: (202) 541-3290 - www.originsonline.com.

Subscriptions: One year, \$114; two years, \$199; three years, \$284; foreign postage additional. Single copy: \$8. Back issues: Inquire for availability and rates. Attach mailing label to change of address requests and subscription correspondence. Postmaster: Send address changes to Origins, CNS Documentary Service, 3211 4th Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20017-1100.

Documentation in Origins is selected on the basis of interest and usefulness in reference to current issues. Publication does not signify endorsement by Origins or its sponsoring body, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

ity and unity. As it explores the inexhaustible mystery of God and the countless ways in which God's grace works for salvation in diverse settings, theology rightly and necessarily takes a multitude of forms, and yet as investigations of the unique truth of the triune God and of the one plan of salvation centered on the one Lord Jesus Christ, this plurality must manifest distinctive family traits.

3. The International Theological Commission has studied various aspects of the theological task in previous texts, notably, "Theological Pluralism" (1972), "Theses on the Relationship Between the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology" (1975), and "The Interpretation of Dogma" (1990).⁴ The present text seeks to identify distinctive family traits of Catholic theology.⁵ It considers basic perspectives and principles which characterize Catholic theology, and offers criteria by which diverse and manifold theologies may nevertheless be recognized as authentically Catholic and as participating in the Catholic Church's mission, which is to proclaim the good news to people of every nation, tribe, people and language (cf. Mt 28:18-20; Rv 7:9), and, by enabling them to hear the voice of the one Lord, to gather them all into one flock with one shepherd (cf. Jn 10:16).

That mission requires there to be in Catholic theology both diversity in unity and unity in diversity. Catholic theologies should be identifiable as such, mutually supportive and mutually accountable, as are Christians themselves in the communion of the church for the glory of God. The present text accordingly consists of three chapters, setting out the following themes: In the rich plurality of its expressions, protagonists, ideas and contexts, theology is Catholic and therefore fundamentally one if it arises from an attentive listening to the word of God (cf. Chapter 1); if it situates itself consciously and faithfully in the communion of the church (cf. Chapter 2); and if it is orientated to the service of God in the world, offering divine truth to the men and women of today in an intelligible form (cf. Chapter 3).

Chapter 1: Listening to the Word of God

4. "It pleased God, in his goodness and wisdom, to reveal himself and to make known the mystery of his will (cf. Eph 1:9)," namely that all people might "have access to the Father through Christ, the Word made flesh, in the Holy Spirit, and thus become sharers in the divine nature (cf. Eph 2:18; 2 Pt 1:4)."⁶ "The novelty of biblical revelation consists in the fact that God becomes known through the dialogue which he desires to have with us."⁷

Theology, in all its diverse traditions, disciplines and methods, is founded on the fundamental act of listening in faith to the revealed Word of God, Christ himself. Listening to God's Word is the definitive principle of Catholic theology; it leads to understanding and speech and to the formation of Christian community: "The church is built upon the word of God; she is born from and lives by that word."⁸

"It is therefore legitimate to speak of the need for a certain unity of theology. However, unity here needs to be carefully understood so as not to be confused with uniformity or a single style."

"We declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn 1:3).⁹ The whole world is to hear the summons to salvation, "so that through hearing it may believe, through belief it may hope, through hope it may come to love."¹⁰

5. Theology is scientific reflection on the divine revelation which the church accepts by faith as universal saving truth. The sheer fullness and richness of that revelation is too great to be grasped by any one theology and in fact gives rise to multiple theologies as it is received in diverse ways by human beings. In its diversity, nevertheless, theology is united in its service of the one truth of God.

The unity of theology therefore does not require uniformity but rather a single focus on God's Word and an explication of its innumerable riches by theologies able to dialogue and communicate with one another. Likewise, the plurality of theologies should not imply fragmentation or discord but rather the exploration in myriad ways of God's one saving truth.

1. The Primacy of the Word of God

6. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (Jn 1:1). The Gospel of John starts with a "prologue." This hymn highlights the cosmic scope of revelation and the culmination of revelation in the incarnation of the Word of God. "What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people" (Jn 1:3-4).

Creation and history constitute the space and time in which God reveals himself.

God one finds the daily profession of faith of the people of Israel: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord' (Dt 6:4). The unheard of fulfillment of God's unreserved love for all people is realized in the incarnation of the Son in Jesus Christ. In this revelation of God's intimacy and the depth of his bond of love with man, the monotheism of the one God is illuminated by a completely new light: a Trinitarian light. And in the mystery of the Trinity the brotherhood of men too is illuminated.

"Christian theology, along with the lives of believers, must restore the happy and crystalline evidence of the impact of the Trinitarian revelation on our community. Although ethnic and religious conflicts in the world make it more difficult to perceive the singularity of the Christian thought about God and the humanism it inspired people can recognize in the name of Jesus Christ the truth of God the Father to which the Holy Spirit stirs creature's every cry (cf. Rom 8).

"Theology, in fruitful dialogue with philosophy, can help believers to become aware of and to testify that Trinitarian monotheism shows us the true face of God, and that this monotheism does not generate violence but is a force of personal and universal peace.

"The starting point of all Christian theology is the acceptance of this divine revelation: personal acceptance of the Word made flesh, listening to the word of God in Scripture. From this starting point theology helps the understanding of faith and its transmission. The entire history of the church demonstrates, however, that acknowledging the starting point is not enough to reach the unity of faith.

"Every reading of the Bible is set in a given literary context, and the only context in which the believer can be in full communion with Christ is the church and her living tradition. We must live ever

afresh the experience of the first disciples, who 'devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:42).

"In this perspective, the commission has studied the principles and criteria according to which a theology can be catholic, and it has also reflected on the current contribution of theology. It is important to remember that Catholic theology, ever attentive to the link between faith and reason, played a historical role in the birth of the university. A truly Catholic theology with the two movements, 'intellectus quaerens fidem et fides quaerens intellectum,' is especially necessary today in order to foster harmony among the symphony of the sciences in order to avoid the violent byproducts of a religiosity that opposes itself to reason and of a reason that sets itself against religion.

"The theological commission thus studies the relationship between the social doctrine of the church and the whole of Christian doctrine. The social commitment of the church is not just something human, nor is it reduced to a social theory. The transformation of society brought about by Christians over centuries is in answer to the coming of the Son of God into the world: The splendor of such truth and love illumines every culture and society.

"St. John says: 'By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren' (1 Jn 3:16). Disciples of Christ the Redeemer know that without consideration for others, forgiveness and love even of our enemies, no human community can live in peace; and this begins in the first and foundational society that is the family.

"In the necessary cooperation for the common good, also with those who do not share our faith, we must make the true and deep religious motives present in our social commitment — just as we

The world, created by God by means of his Word (cf. Gn 1), is also, however, the setting for the rejection of God by human beings. Nevertheless, God's love toward them is always infinitely greater; "the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness does not overcome it" (Jn 1:5).

"Theology is scientific reflection on the divine revelation which the church accepts by faith as universal saving truth. The sheer fullness and richness of that revelation is too great to be grasped by any one theology and in fact gives rise to multiple theologies as it is received in diverse ways by human beings."

The incarnation of the Son is the culmination of that steadfast love: "And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth" (Jn 1:14). The revelation of God as Father who loves the world (cf. Jn 3:16, 35) is realized in the revelation of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen, the Son of God and "Savior of the world" (Jn 4:42).

In "many and various ways" God spoke through the prophets in former times, but in the fullness of time he spoke to us "by a Son whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds" (Heb 1:1-2). "No one has ever seen God. It is God, the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (Jn 1:18).

7. The church greatly venerates the Scriptures, but it is important to recognize that "the Christian faith is not a 'religion of the book'; Christianity is the 'religion of the Word of God,' not of 'a written and mute word but of the incarnate and living Word.'"¹¹ The Gospel of God is fundamentally testified by the sacred Scripture of both Old and New Testaments.¹² The Scriptures are "inspired by God and committed to writing once and for all time"; hence, "they present God's own word in an unalterable form, and they make the voice of the Holy Spirit sound again and again in the words of the prophets and apostles."¹³ Tradition is the faithful transmission of the word of God, witnessed in the canon of Scripture by the prophets and the apostles and in the *leiturgia* (liturgy), *martyria* (testi-

mony) and *diakonia* (service) of the church.

8. St. Augustine wrote that the word of God was heard by inspired authors and transmitted by their words: "God speaks through a human being in human fashion; and speaking thus he seeks us."¹⁴ The Holy Spirit not only inspired the biblical authors to find the right words of witness but also assists the readers of the Bible in every age to understand the Word of God in the human words of the holy Scriptures.

The relationship between Scripture and tradition is rooted in the truth which God reveals in his word for our salvation: "The books of Scripture, firmly, faithfully and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the sacred Scriptures,"¹⁵ and through the ages the Holy Spirit "leads believers to the full truth and makes the word of Christ dwell in them in all its richness (cf. Col 3:16)."¹⁶ "[T]he word of God is given to us in sacred Scripture as an inspired testimony to revelation; together with the church's living tradition, it constitutes the supreme rule of faith."¹⁷

9. A criterion of Catholic theology is recognition of the primacy of the word of God. God speaks "in many and various ways" — in creation, through prophets and sages, through the holy Scriptures and definitively through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh (cf. Heb 1:1-2).

2. Faith, the Response to God's Word

10. St. Paul writes in his letter to the Romans, "Faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17). He makes two important points here. On the one hand, he explains that faith follows from listening to the word of God, always "by the power of the Spirit of God" (Rom 15:19). On the other hand, he clarifies the means by which the word of God reaches human ears: fundamentally by means of those who have been sent to proclaim the word and to awaken faith (cf. Rom 10:14-15). It follows that the word of God for all time can be proclaimed authentically only on the foundation of the apostles (cf. Eph 2:20-22) and in apostolic succession (cf. 1 Tm 4:6).

11. Since Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, "is himself both the mediator and the sum total of revelation,"¹⁸ the response that the Word seeks, namely faith, is likewise personal. By faith human beings entrust their entire selves to God in an act which involves the "full submission" of the intellect and will to the God who reveals.¹⁹

"The obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5) is thus something personal. By faith, human beings

open their ears to listen to God's word and their mouths also to offer him prayer and praise; they open their hearts to receive the love of God, which is poured into them through the gift of the Holy Spirit (cf. Rom 5:5); and they "abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom 15:13), a hope "which does not disappoint" (Rom 5:5).

"The plurality of theologies should not imply fragmentation or discord but rather the exploration in myriad ways of God's one saving truth."

Thus, a living faith can be understood as embracing both hope and love. Paul emphasizes, moreover, that the faith evoked by the word of God resides in the heart and gives rise to a verbal confession: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved" (Rom 10:9-10).

12. Faith, then, is experience of God which involves knowledge of him, since revelation gives access to the truth of God which saves us (cf. 2 Thes 2:13) and makes us free (cf. Jn 8:32). Paul writes to the Galatians that, as believers, they "have come to know God, or rather to be known by God" (Gal 4:9; cf. 1 Jn 4:16).

Without faith, it would be impossible to gain insight into this truth, because it is revealed by God. The truth revealed by God and accepted in faith, moreover, is not something irrational. Rather, it gives rise to the "spiritual worship" [*logiké latreía*] that Paul says involves a renewal of the mind (Rom 12:1-2).

That God exists and is one, the creator and Lord of history, can be known with the aid of reason from the works of creation, according to a long tradition found in both the Old (cf. Wis 13:1-9) and New Testaments (cf. Rom 1:18-23).²⁰ However, that God has revealed himself through the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of his Son for the salvation of the world (cf. Jn 3:16), and that God in his inner life is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, can be known only through faith.

13. Faith is both an act of belief or trust and also that which is believed or confessed, *fides qua* and *fides quae*, respectively. Both aspects work together inseparably, since trust is adhesion to a message with intelligible content,

and confession cannot be reduced to mere lip service, it must come from the heart.

Faith is at the same time a reality profoundly personal and ecclesial. In professing their faith, Christians say both "I believe" and "we believe." Faith is professed within the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 13:13), which unites all believers with God and among themselves (cf. 1 Jn 1:1-3), and achieves its ultimate expression in the Eucharist (cf. 1 Cor 10:16-17).

Professions of faith have developed within the community of the faithful since earliest times. All Christians are called to give personal witness to their faith, but the creeds enable the church as such to profess her faith. This profession corresponds to the teaching of the apostles, the good news, in which the church stands and through which it is saved (cf. 1 Cor 15:1-11).

14. "False prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive opinions" (2 Pt 2:1).²¹ The New Testament shows abundantly that, from the very beginnings of the church, certain people have proposed a "heretical" interpretation of the faith held in common, an interpretation opposed to the apostolic tradition.

In the First Letter of John, separation from the communion of love is an indicator of false teaching (1 Jn 2:18-19). Heresy thus not only distorts the Gospel, it also damages ecclesial communion. "Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same."²²

Those guilty of such obstinacy against the teaching of the church substitute their own judgment for obedience to the word of God (the formal motive of faith), the *fides qua*. Heresy serves as a reminder that the communion of the church can only be secured on the basis of the Catholic faith in its integrity and prompts the church to an ever deeper search for truth in communion.

15. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it takes the faith of the church as its source, context and norm. Theology holds the *fides qua* and the *fides quae* together. It expounds the teaching of the apostles, the good news about Jesus Christ "in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor 15:3, 4), as the rule and stimulus of the church's faith.

3. Theology, the Understanding of Faith

16. The act of faith, in response to the word of God, opens the intelligence of the believer to new horizons. St. Paul writes, "It is the God

expect others to express their own motivations — so that collaboration occurs with transparency. Those who have perceived the basis of Christian social action will also be able to find in it a reason to take into consideration the same faith in Christ Jesus.

"Dear friends, our meeting confirms in a meaningful way how much the church needs the competent and faithful reflection of theologians on the mystery of the God of Jesus Christ and of his church. Without healthy and vigorous theological reflection the church runs the risk of not fully expressing the harmony between faith and reason. At the same time, without the faithful experience of communion with the church and adherence to her magisterium, which is the vital space of her existence, theology would not succeed in explaining the gift of faith adequately.

"Extending through you my good wishes and encouragement to all our brother and sister theologians working in various ecclesial contexts, I invoke upon you the intercession of Mary, the woman of Advent and the mother of the Word Incarnate, who in keeping the Word in her heart, is for us a paradigm of right theology, the sublime model of true knowledge of the Son of God. May she, Star of Hope, guide and protect the precious work that you carry out for the church and in the name of the church. With these feelings of gratitude, I once again impart to you my apostolic blessing. Thank you."

who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). In this light, faith contemplates the whole world in a new way; it sees it more truly because, empowered by the Holy Spirit, it shares in God's own perspective.

That is why St. Augustine invites everyone who seeks truth to "believe in order to understand" [*crede ut intelligas*].²³ We have received "the Spirit that is from God," St. Paul says, "so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God" (1 Cor 2:12). Moreover, by this gift we are drawn into an understanding even of God himself, because "the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God." By teaching that "we have the mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16), St. Paul implies that by God's grace we have a certain participation even in Christ's own knowledge of his Father and thereby in God's own self-knowledge.

17. Placed in possession of "the boundless riches of Christ" (Eph 3:8) by faith, believers seek to understand ever more fully that which they believe, pondering it in their hearts (cf. Lk 2:19). Led by the Spirit and utilizing all the resources of their intelligence, they strive to assimilate the intelligible content of the word of God, so that it may become light and nourishment for their faith. They ask of God that they may be "filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding" (Col 1:9).

This is the way of the understanding of faith (*intellectus fidei*). As St. Augustine explains, it unfolds from the very dynamism of faith: "One who now understands by a true reason what he previously just believed is surely to be preferred to one who still desires to understand what he believes; but if one does not desire and if one thinks that only those things are to be believed which can be understood, then one ignores the very purpose of faith."²⁴

This work of understanding faith contributes in turn to the nourishment of faith and enables the latter to grow.²⁵ Thus it is that "faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth."²⁶ The way of the *intellectus fidei* is the path from believing, which is its source and permanent principle, to seeing in

glory (the beatific vision; cf. 1 Jn 3:2), of which the *intellectus fidei* is an anticipation.

18. The *intellectus fidei* takes various forms in the life of the church and in the community of believers in accordance with the different gifts of the faithful (*lectio divina*, meditation, preaching, theology as a science, etc.). It becomes theology in the strict sense when the believer undertakes to present the content of the Christian mystery in a rational and scientific way. Theology is therefore *scientia Dei* inasmuch as it is a rational participation in the knowledge that God has of himself and of all things.

19. A criterion of Catholic theology is that, precisely as the science of faith, "faith seeking understanding" [*fides quaerens intellectum*],²⁷ it has a rational dimension. Theology strives to understand what the church believes, why it believes and what can be known *sub specie Dei*. As *scientia Dei*, theology aims to understand in a rational and systematic manner the saving truth of God.

Chapter 2: Abiding in the Communion of the Church

20. The proper place for theology is within the church, which is gathered together by the Word of God. The ecclesiality of theology is a constitutive aspect of the theological task, because theology is based on faith, and faith itself is both personal and ecclesial.

The revelation of God is directed toward the convocation and renewal of the people of God, and it is through the church that theologians receive the object of their inquiry. In Catholic theology there has been considerable reflection on the *loci* of theology, that is, the fundamental reference points for the theological task.²⁸ It is important to know not just the *loci* but also their relative weight and the relationship between them.

1. The Study of Scripture as the Soul of Theology

21. The "study of the sacred page" should be the "very soul of sacred theology."²⁹ This is the Second Vatican Council's core affirmation with regard to theology. Pope Benedict XVI reiterates, "Where theology is not essentially the interpretation of the church's Scripture, such a theology no longer has a foundation."³⁰

Theology in its entirety should

conform to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures should sustain and accompany all theological work, because theology is concerned with "the truth of the Gospel" (Gal 2:5), and it can know that truth only if it investigates the normative witness to it in the canon of sacred Scripture,³¹ and if, in doing so, it relates the human words of the Bible to the living Word of God.

"Catholic exegetes must never forget that what they are interpreting is the word of God. ... They arrive at the true goal of their work only when they have explained the meaning of the biblical text as God's word for today."³²

22. *Dei Verbum* sees the task of exegesis as that of ascertaining "what God has wished to communicate to us."³³ To understand and explain the meaning of the biblical texts,³⁴ it must make use of all the appropriate philological, historical and literary methods, with the aim of clarifying and understanding sacred Scripture in its own context and period. Thus the historicity of revelation is methodologically taken into account.

Dei Verbum No. 12 makes particular reference to the need for attentiveness to literary forms: "For the fact is that truth is differently presented and expressed in the various types of historical writing, in prophetic and poetic texts and in other forms of literary expression."

Since the council, further methods which can unfold new aspects of the meaning of Scripture have been developed.³⁵ *Dei Verbum* No. 12 indicates, however, that in order to acknowledge "the divine dimension of the Bible" and to achieve a truly "theological" interpretation of Scripture, "three fundamental criteria" must also be taken into account:³⁶ the unity of Scripture, the witness of tradition and the analogy of faith.³⁷

The council refers to the unity of Scripture because the Bible testifies to the entire truth of salvation only in its pluriform totality.³⁸ Exegesis has developed methodological ways of taking account of the canon of Scripture as a whole as a hermeneutical reference point for interpreting Scripture. The significance of the location and content of the different books and pericopes can thereby be determined.

Overall, as the council teaches, exegesis should strive to read and interpret the biblical texts in the broad set-

ting of the faith and life of the people of God, sustained through the ages by the working of the Holy Spirit. It is in this context that exegesis searches for the literal sense and opens itself to the spiritual or fuller sense (*sensus plenior*) of Scripture.³⁹ “Only where both methodological levels, the historico-critical and the theological, are respected, can one speak of a theological exegesis, an exegesis worthy of this book.”⁴⁰

23. In saying that the study of sacred Scripture is the “soul” of theology, *Dei Verbum* has in mind all of the theological disciplines. This foundation in the revealed word of God, as testified by Scripture and tradition, is essential for theology. Its primary task is to interpret God’s truth as saving truth.

Urged on by Vatican II, Catholic theology seeks to attend to the word of God and thereby to the witness of Scripture in all its work.⁴¹ Thus it is that in theological expositions “biblical themes should have first place,” before anything else.⁴² This approach corresponds anew to that of the Fathers of the Church, who were “primarily and essentially ‘commentators on sacred Scripture,’”⁴³ and it opens up the possibility of ecumenical collaboration: “Shared listening to the Scriptures ... spurs us on toward the dialogue of charity and enables growth in the dialogue of truth.”⁴⁴

24. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should draw constantly upon the canonical witness of Scripture and should promote the anchoring of all of the church’s doctrine and practice in that witness, since “all the preaching of the church, as indeed the entire Christian religion, should be nourished and ruled by sacred Scripture.”⁴⁵ Theology should endeavor to open wide the Scriptures to the Christian faithful,⁴⁶ so that the faithful may come into contact with the living Word of God (cf. Heb 4:12).

2. Fidelity to Apostolic Tradition

25. The Acts of the Apostles describes the life of the early Christian community in a way that is fundamental for the church of all times: “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42; cf. Rv 1:3). This succinct description, at the end of the account of the feast of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit opened the mouths of the apostles to preach and brought

many of those who heard them to faith, highlights various essential aspects of the Spirit’s ongoing work in the church. There is already an anticipatory outline of the church’s teaching and sacramental life, of its spirituality and commitment to charity.

“Theology strives to understand what the church believes, why it believes and what can be known ‘sub specie Dei.’ As ‘scientia Dei,’ theology aims to understand in a rational and systematic manner the saving truth of God.”

All of these began in the apostolic community, and the handing on of this integral way of life in the Spirit is apostolic tradition. *Lex orandi* (the rule of prayer), *lex credendi* (the rule of belief) and *lex vivendi* (the rule of life) are all essential aspects of this tradition. Paul refers to the tradition into which as an apostle he has been incorporated when he speaks of “handing on” what he himself “received” (1 Cor 15:1-11, cf. also 1 Cor 11:23-26).

26. Tradition is therefore something living and vital, an ongoing process in which the unity of faith finds expression in the variety of languages and the diversity of cultures. It ceases to be tradition if it fossilizes. “The tradition that comes from the apostles makes progress in the church with the help of the Holy Spirit. There is a growth in insight into the realities and words that are being passed on. ... Thus, as the centuries go by, the church is always advancing toward the plenitude of divine truth, until eventually the words of God are fulfilled in her.”⁴⁷

Tradition occurs in the power of the Holy Spirit, who, as Jesus promised his disciples, guides the church into all the truth (cf. Jn 16:13) by firmly establishing the memory of Jesus himself (cf. Jn 14:26), keeping the church faithful to her apostolic origins, enabling the secure transmission of the faith and prompting the ever new presentation of the Gospel

under the direction of pastors who are successors of the apostles.⁴⁸

Vital components of tradition are therefore: a constantly renewed study of sacred Scripture, liturgical worship, attention to what the witnesses of faith have taught through the ages, catechesis fostering growth in faith, practical love of God and neighbor, structured ecclesial ministry and the service given by the magisterium to the word of God. What is handed on comprises “everything that serves to make the people of God live their lives in holiness and increase their faith.” The church “in her doctrine, life and worship, perpetuates and transmits to every generation all that she herself is, all that she believes.”⁴⁹

27. “The sayings of the holy fathers are a witness to the life-giving presence of ... tradition, showing how its riches are poured out in the practice and life of the church, in her belief and her prayer.”⁵⁰ Because the Fathers of the Church, both East and West, have a unique place in the “faithful transmission and elucidation” of revealed truth,⁵¹ their writings are a specific reference point (*locus*) for Catholic theology. The tradition known and lived by the fathers was multifaceted and pulsing with life, as can be seen from the plurality of liturgical families and of spiritual and exegetical-theological traditions (e.g. in the schools of Alexandria and Antioch), a plurality firmly anchored and united in the one faith.

During the major theological controversies of the fourth and fifth centuries, the conformity of a doctrine with the consensus of the fathers, or lack of it, was proof of orthodoxy or heresy.⁵² For Augustine, the united witness of the fathers was the voice of the church.⁵³ The councils of Chalcedon and Trent began their solemn declarations with the formula: “Following the holy fathers,”⁵⁴ and the Council of Trent and the First Vatican Council clearly indicated that the “unanimous consensus” of the fathers was a sure guide for the interpretation of Scripture.⁵⁵

28. Many of the fathers were bishops who gathered with their fellow bishops in the councils, first regional and later worldwide, or “ecumenical,” that mark the life of the church from the earliest centuries, after the example of the apostles (cf. Acts 15:6-21). Confronted with the Christological and Trinitarian her-

esies that threatened the faith and unity of the church during the patristic period, bishops met in the great ecumenical councils — Nicaea I, Constantinople I, Ephesus, Chalcedon, Constantinople II, Constantinople III and Nicaea II — to condemn error and proclaim the orthodox faith in creeds and definitions of faith.

These councils set forth their teaching, in particular their solemn definitions, as normative and universally binding; and these definitions express and belong to the apostolic tradition and continue to serve the faith and unity of the church. Subsequent councils which have been recognized as ecumenical in the West continued this practice.

The Second Vatican Council refers to the teaching office or magisterium of the pope and the bishops of the church, and states that the bishops teach infallibly when, either gathered with the bishop of Rome in an ecumenical council or in communion with him though dispersed throughout the world, they agree that a particular teaching concerning faith or morals “is to be held definitively and absolutely.” The pope himself, head of the college of bishops, teaches infallibly when “as supreme pastor and teacher of all the faithful ... he proclaims in an absolute decision a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals.”⁵⁶

29. Catholic theology recognizes the teaching authority of ecumenical councils, the ordinary and universal magisterium of the bishops and the papal magisterium. It acknowledges the special status of dogmas, that is, statements “in which the church proposes a revealed truth definitively and in a way that is binding for the universal church, so much so that denial is rejected as heresy and falls under an anathema.”⁵⁷

Dogmas belong to the living and ongoing apostolic tradition. Theologians are aware of the difficulties that attend their interpretation. For example, it is necessary to understand the precise question under consideration in light of its historical context and to discern how a dogma’s meaning and content are related to its formulation.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, dogmas are sure points of reference for the church’s faith and are used as such in theological reflection and argumentation.

30. In Catholic belief, Scripture, tradition and the magisterium of the church

are inseparably linked. “Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture make up a single sacred deposit of the word of God, which is entrusted to the church,” and “the task of giving an authentic interpretation of the word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of tradition, has been entrusted to the living teaching office of the church alone.”⁵⁹

“Tradition is therefore something living and vital, an ongoing process in which the unity of faith finds expression in the variety of languages and the diversity of cultures. It ceases to be tradition if it fossilizes.”

Sacred Scripture is not simply a text but “*locutio Dei*”⁶⁰ and “*verbum Dei*,”⁶¹ testified initially by the prophets of the Old Testament and ultimately by the apostles in the New Testament (cf. Rom 1:1-2). Having arisen in the midst of the people of God and having been unified, read and interpreted by the people of God, sacred Scripture belongs to the living tradition of the church as the canonical witness to the faith for all time. Indeed, “Scripture is the first member in the written tradition.”⁶²

“Scripture is to be proclaimed, heard, read, received and experienced as the word of God, in the stream of the apostolic tradition from which it is inseparable.”⁶³ This process is sustained by the Holy Spirit, “through whom the living voice of the Gospel rings out in the church — and through her in the world.”⁶⁴

“Sacred Scripture is the speech of God as it is put down in writing under the breath of the Holy Spirit. And tradition transmits in its entirety the word of God which has been entrusted to the apostles by Christ the Lord and the Holy Spirit. It transmits it to the successors of the apostles so that, enlightened by the Spirit of truth, they may faithfully preserve, expound and spread it abroad by their preaching. Thus it comes about that the church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone.”⁶⁵

She draws it also from the apostolic tradition, because the latter is the living process of the church’s listening to the word of God.

31. Vatican II distinguished between tradition and those traditions that belong to particular periods of the church’s history or to particular regions and communities such as religious orders or specific local churches.⁶⁶ Distinguishing between tradition and traditions has been one of the major tasks of Catholic theology since Vatican II and of theology generally in recent decades.⁶⁷ It is a task profoundly related to the church’s catholicity and with many ecumenical implications.

Numerous questions arise, for instance: “Is it possible to determine more precisely what the content of the one tradition is and by what means? Do all traditions which claim to be Christian contain the tradition? How can we distinguish between traditions embodying the true tradition and merely human traditions? Where do we find the genuine tradition and where impoverished tradition or even distortion of tradition?”⁶⁸

On one hand, theology must show that apostolic tradition is not something abstract, but that it exists concretely in the different traditions that have formed within the church. On the other hand, theology has to consider why certain traditions are characteristic not of the church as a whole but only of particular religious orders, local churches or historical periods.

While criticism is not appropriate with reference to apostolic tradition itself, *traditions* must always be open to critique, so that the “continual reformation” of which the church has need⁶⁹ can take place and so that the church can renew herself permanently on her one foundation, namely Jesus Christ. Such a critique seeks to verify whether a specific tradition does indeed express the faith of the church in a particular place and time, and it seeks correspondingly to strengthen or correct it through contact with the living faith of all places and all times.

32. Fidelity to the apostolic tradition is a criterion of Catholic theology. This fidelity requires an active and discerning reception of the various witnesses and expressions of the ongoing apostolic tradition. It implies study of sacred

Scripture, the liturgy and the writings of the fathers and doctors of the church, and attention to the teaching of the magisterium.

3. Attention to the 'Sensus Fidelium'

33. In his First Letter to the Thessalonians, St. Paul writes, "We constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers" (1 Thes 2:13).

These words illustrate what Vatican II referred to as "the supernatural appreciation of the faith [*sensus fidei*] of the whole people,"⁷⁰ and "the intimate sense of spiritual realities"⁷¹ that the faithful have, that is, the *sensus fidelium*. The subject of faith is the people of God as a whole, which in the power of the Spirit affirms the word of God. That is why the council declares that the entire people of God participate in the prophetic ministry of Jesus,⁷² and that, anointed by the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Jn 2:20, 27), it "cannot err in matters of belief."⁷³

The pastors who guide the people of God, serving its faith, are themselves first of all members of the communion of believers. Therefore *Lumen Gentium* speaks first about the people of God and the *sensus fidei* that they have,⁷⁴ and then of the bishops⁷⁵ who, through their apostolic succession in the episcopate and the reception of their own specific *charisma veritatis certum* (sure charism of truth),⁷⁶ constitute, as a college in hierarchical communion with their head, the bishop of Rome and successor of St. Peter in the apostolic see,⁷⁷ the church's magisterium.

Likewise, *Dei Verbum* teaches that the word of God has been "entrusted to the church" and refers to the "entire holy people" adhering to it, before then specifying that the pope and the bishops have the task of authentically interpreting the word of God.⁷⁸ This ordering is fundamental for Catholic theology. As St. Augustine said, "*Vobis sum episcopus, vobiscum sum christianus.*"⁷⁹

34. The nature and location of the *sensus fidei* or *sensus fidelium* must be properly understood. The *sensus fidelium* does not simply mean the majority opinion in a given time or culture, nor is it only a secondary affirmation of what is first taught by the magisterium. The

sensus fidelium is the *sensus fidei* of the people of God as a whole who are obedient to the word of God and are led in the ways of faith by their pastors. So the *sensus fidelium* is the sense of the faith that is deeply rooted in the people of God who receive, understand and live the word of God in the church.

"Catholic theology recognizes the teaching authority of ecumenical councils, the ordinary and universal magisterium of the bishops and the papal magisterium. It acknowledges the special status of dogmas."

35. For theologians, the *sensus fidelium* is of great importance. It is not only an object of attention and respect, it is also a base and a *locus* for their work. On the one hand, theologians depend on the *sensus fidelium* because the faith that they explore and explain lives in the people of God. It is clear, therefore, that theologians themselves must participate in the life of the church to be truly aware of it.

On the other hand, part of the particular service of theologians within the body of Christ is precisely to explicate the church's faith as it is found in the Scriptures, the liturgy, creeds, dogmas, catechisms and in the *sensus fidelium* itself. Theologians help to clarify and articulate the content of the *sensus fidei*, recognizing and demonstrating that issues relating to the truth of faith can be complex and that investigation of them must be precise.⁸⁰

It falls to them also on occasion critically to examine expressions of popular piety, new currents of thought and movements within the church in the name of fidelity to the apostolic tradition. Theologians' critical assessments must always be constructive; they must be given with humility, respect and charity: "Knowledge (*gnosis*) puffs up, but love (*agape*) builds up" (1 Cor 8:1).

36. Attention to the *sensus fidelium* is a criterion for Catholic theology. Theology should strive to discover and articulate accurately what the Catholic

faithful actually believe. It must speak the truth in love, so that the faithful may mature in faith and not be "tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph 4:14-15).

4. Responsible Adherence to the Ecclesiastical Magisterium

37. In Catholic theology the magisterium is an integral factor in the theological enterprise itself, since theology receives its object from God through the church, whose faith is authentically interpreted by "the living teaching office of the church alone,"⁸¹ that is, by the magisterium of the pope and the bishops. Fidelity to the magisterium is necessary for theology to be the knowledge of faith (*scientia fidei*) and an ecclesial task.

A correct theological methodology therefore requires a proper understanding of the nature and authority of the magisterium at its various levels and of the relations that properly exist between the ecclesiastical magisterium and theology.⁸² Bishops and theologians have distinct callings and must respect one another's particular competence, lest the magisterium reduce theology to a mere repetitive science or theologians presume to substitute the teaching office of the church's pastors.

38. An understanding of the church as communion is a good framework within which to consider how the relationship between theologians and bishops, between theology and the magisterium, can be one of fruitful collaboration. The first thing to acknowledge is that theologians in their work and bishops in their magisterium both stand under the primacy of the word of God and never above it.⁸³

Between bishops and theologians there should be a mutually respectful collaboration; in their obedient listening to this word and faithful proclamation of it; in their attention to the *sensus fidelium* and service of the growth and maturing of faith; in their concern to transmit the word to future generations, with respect for new questions and challenges; and in their hope-filled witness to the gifts already received; in all of this bishops and theologians have their respective roles in one common mission,⁸⁴ from which the magisterium and theology each derive their own legitimacy and purpose.⁸⁵

Theology investigates and articulates the faith of the church, and the ecclesiastical magisterium proclaims that faith and authentically interprets it.⁸⁶

39. On the one hand, the magisterium needs theology in order to demonstrate in its interventions not only doctrinal authority but also theological competence and a capacity for critical evaluation, so theologians should be called upon to assist with the preparation and formulation of magisterial pronouncements. On the other hand, the magisterium is an indispensable help to theology by its authentic transmission of the deposit of faith (*depositum fidei*), particularly at decisive times of discernment.

Theologians should acknowledge the contribution of magisterial statements to theological progress and should assist with the reception of those statements. Magisterial interventions themselves can stimulate theological reflection, and theologians should show how their own contributions conform with and carry forward previous doctrinal statements of the magisterium.

There is indeed in the church a certain “magisterium” of theologians,⁸⁷ but there is no place for parallel, opposing or alternative magisteria⁸⁸ or for views that would separate theology from the church’s magisterium.

40. When it comes to the “authentic” interpretation of the faith, the magisterium plays a role that theology simply cannot take to itself. Theology cannot substitute a judgment coming from the scientific theological community for that of the bishops. Acceptance of this function of the magisterium in relation to the authenticity of faith requires recognition of the different levels of magisterial affirmations.⁸⁹

These different levels give rise to a correspondingly differentiated response on the part of the faithful and of theologians. Not all magisterial teaching has the same weight. This itself is relevant to the work of theology, and indeed the different levels are described by what are called “theological qualifications or notes.”⁹⁰

41. Precisely because of this gradation, the obedience that theologians as members of the people of God owe to the magisterium always involves constructively critical evaluation and comment.⁹¹ While “dissent” toward the

magisterium has no place in Catholic theology, investigation and questioning is justified and even necessary if theology is to fulfill its task.⁹²

Whatever the situation, a mere formal and exterior obedience or adherence on the part of theologians is not sufficient. Theologians should strive to deepen their reflection on the truth proclaimed by the church’s magisterium and should seek its implications for the Christian life and for the service of the truth. In this way theologians fulfill their proper task, and the teaching of the magisterium is not reduced to mere decorative citations in theological discourse.

“The word of God for all time can be proclaimed authentically only on the foundation of the apostles (cf. Eph 2:20-22) and in apostolic succession (cf. 1 Tm 4:6).”

42. The relationship between bishops and theologians is often good and trusting on both sides, with due respect for one another’s callings and responsibilities. For example, bishops attend and participate in national and regional gatherings of theological associations, call on theological experts as they formulate their own teaching and policies, and visit and support theological faculties and schools in their dioceses.

Inevitably, there will be tensions at times in the relationship between theologians and bishops. In his profound analysis of the dynamic interaction within the living organism of the church of the three offices of Christ as prophet, priest and king, Blessed John Henry Newman acknowledged the possibility of such “chronic collisions or contrasts,” and it is well to remember that he saw them as “lying in the nature of the case.”⁹³ “Theology is the fundamental and regulating principle of the whole church system,” he wrote, and yet “theology cannot always have its own way.”⁹⁴

With regard to tensions between theologians and the magisterium, the International Theological Commission said in 1975: “Wherever there is genuine life, tension always exists.” “Such ten-

sion need not be interpreted as hostility or real opposition, but can be seen as a vital force and an incentive to a common carrying out of [their] respective tasks by way of dialogue.”⁹⁵

43. The freedom of theology and of theologians is a theme of special interest.⁹⁶ This freedom “derives from the true scientific responsibility of theologians.”⁹⁷ The idea of adherence to the magisterium sometimes prompts a critical contrast between a so-called “scientific” theology (without presuppositions of faith or ecclesial allegiance) and a so-called “confessional” theology (elaborated within a religious confession), but such a contrast is inadequate.⁹⁸

Other debates arise from consideration of the believer’s freedom of conscience or of the importance of scientific progress in theological investigation, and the magisterium is sometimes cast as a repressive force or a brake on progress. Investigating such issues is itself part of the theological task, so as properly to integrate the scientific and confessional aspects of theology and to see the freedom of theology within the horizon of the design and will of God.

44. Giving responsible adherence to the magisterium in its various gradations is a criterion of Catholic theology. Catholic theologians should recognize the competence of bishops, and especially of the college of bishops headed by the pope, to give an authentic interpretation of the word of God handed on in Scripture and tradition.⁹⁹

5. In the Company of Theologians

45. As is the case with all Christian vocations, the ministry of theologians, as well as being personal, is also both communal and collegial; that is, it is exercised in and for the church as a whole, and it is lived out in solidarity with those who have the same calling.

Theologians are rightly conscious and proud of the profound links of solidarity that unite them with one another in service to the body of Christ and to the world. In very many ways, as colleagues in theological faculties and schools, as fellow members of theological societies and associations, as collaborators in research and as writers and teachers, they support, encourage and inspire one another, and also serve as mentors and role models for those, especially graduate students, who are

aspiring to be theologians. Moreover, links of solidarity rightly extend in space and time, uniting theologians across the world in different countries and cultures, and through time in different eras and contexts.

This solidarity is truly beneficial when it promotes awareness and observance of the criteria of Catholic theology as identified in this report. No one is better placed to assist Catholic theologians in striving to give the best possible service, in accordance with the true characteristics of their discipline, than other Catholic theologians.

46. Nowadays collaboration in research and publication projects, both within and across various theological fields, is increasingly common. Opportunities for presentations, seminars and conferences that will strengthen the mutual awareness and appreciation of colleagues in theological institutions and faculties should be cultivated. Moreover, occasions for interdisciplinary encounter and exchange between theologians and philosophers, natural and social scientists, historians and so on should also be fostered, since, as is indicated in this report, theology is a science that thrives in interaction with other sciences, as they do also in fruitful exchange with theology.

47. In the nature of their task, theologians often work at the frontiers of the church's experience and reflection. Especially with the expanded number nowadays of lay theologians who have experience of particular areas of interaction between the church and the world, between the Gospel and life, with which ordained theologians and theologians in religious life may not be so familiar, it is increasingly the case that theologians give an initial articulation of "faith seeking understanding" in new circumstances or in the face of new issues.

Theologians need and deserve the prayerful support of the ecclesial community as a whole and particularly of one another in their sincere endeavors on behalf of the church, but careful adherence to the fundamental criteria of Catholic theology is especially important in such circumstances. Theologians should always recognize the intrinsic provisionality of their endeavors and offer their work to the church as a whole for scrutiny and evaluation.¹⁰⁰

48. One of the most valuable services that theologians render to one another is that of mutual questioning and correction, e.g. by the medieval practice of the *disputatio* and today's practice of reviewing one another's writings, so that ideas and methods can be progressively refined and perfected, and this process generally and healthily occurs within the theological community itself.¹⁰¹

"While criticism is not appropriate with reference to apostolic tradition itself, traditions must always be open to critique, so that the 'continual reformation' of which the church has need can take place and so that the church can renew herself permanently on her one foundation, namely Jesus Christ."

Of its nature, however, it can be a slow and private process and especially in these days of instant communication and dissemination of ideas far beyond the strictly theological community, it would be unreasonable to imagine that this self-correcting mechanism suffices in all cases. The bishops who watch over the faithful, teaching and caring for them, certainly have the right and the duty to speak, to intervene and if necessary to censure theological work that they deem to be erroneous or harmful.¹⁰²

49. Ecumenical dialogue and research provide a uniquely privileged and potentially productive field for collaboration between Catholic theologians and those of other Christian traditions. In such work, issues of faith, meaning and language are deeply pondered. As they work to promote mutual understanding on issues that have been contentious between their traditions, perhaps for many centuries, theologians act as ambassadors for their communities in the holy task of seeking the reconciliation and unity of Christians, so that the world may believe (cf. Jn 17:21).

That ambassadorial task requires particular adherence to the criteria out-

lined here on the part of Catholic participants so that the manifold gifts that the Catholic tradition contains can truly be offered in the "exchange of gifts" that ecumenical dialogue and collaboration more widely always in some sense is.¹⁰³

50. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should be practiced in professional, prayerful and charitable collaboration with the whole company of Catholic theologians in the communion of the church in a spirit of mutual appreciation and support, attentive both to the needs and comments of the faithful and to the guidance of the church's pastors.

6. In Dialogue With the World

51. "The people of God believe that they are led by the Spirit of the Lord, who fills the whole world."¹⁰⁴ The Second Vatican Council said that the church should therefore be ready to discern in "the events, the needs and the longings" of today's world what may truly be signs of the Spirit's activity.¹⁰⁵

"At all times the church carries the responsibility of reading the signs of the times [*signa temporum perscrutandi*] and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel, if it is to carry out its task. In language intelligible to every generation, she should be able to answer the ever recurring questions which [people] ask about the meaning of this present life and of the life to come, and how one is related to the other. We must be aware of and understand the aspirations, the yearnings and the often dramatic features of the world in which we live."¹⁰⁶

52. As they live their daily lives in the world with faith, all Christians face the challenge of interpreting the events and crises that arise in human affairs, and all engage in conversation and debate in which, inevitably, faith is questioned and a response is needed. The whole church lives, as it were, at the interface between the Gospel and everyday life, which is also the boundary between the past and the future as history moves forward.

The church is always in dialogue and in movement, and within the communion of the baptized who are all dynamically engaged in this way bishops and theologians have particular responsibilities, as the council made clear. "With the help of the Holy Spirit, it is the task of the whole people of God, particularly

of its pastors and theologians, to listen to and distinguish the many voices of our times and to interpret them in the light of the divine word, in order that the revealed truth may be more deeply penetrated, better understood and more suitably presented.”¹⁰⁷

53. Theology has a particular competence and responsibility in this regard. Through its constant dialogue with the social, religious and cultural currents of the time, and through its openness to other sciences which, with their own methods examine those developments, theology can help the faithful and the magisterium to see the importance of developments, events and trends in human history, and to discern and interpret ways in which through them the Spirit may be speaking to the church and to the world.

54. The “signs of the times” may be described as those events or phenomena in human history which, in a sense, because of their impact or extent, define the face of a period and bring to expression particular needs and aspirations of humanity at that time. The council’s use of the expression *signs of the times* shows that it fully recognized the historicity not only of the world but also of the church, which is in the world (cf. Jn 17:11, 15, 18) though not of the world (cf. Jn 17:14, 16).

What is happening in the world at large, good or bad, can never be a matter of indifference to the church. The world is the place in which the church, following in the footsteps of Christ, announces the Gospel, bears witness to the justice and mercy of God, and participates in the drama of human life.

55. Recent centuries have seen major social and cultural developments. One might think, for instance, of the discovery of historicity and of movements such as the Enlightenment and the French Revolution (with its ideals of freedom, equality and fraternity), movements for emancipation and for the promotion of women’s rights, movements for peace and justice, liberation and democratization, and the ecological movement.

The ambivalence of human history has led the church at times in the past to be overly cautious about such movements, to see only the threats they may contain to Christian doctrine and faith, and to neglect their significance. However, such attitudes have gradu-

ally changed thanks to the *sensus fidei* of the people of God, the clear sight of prophetic individual believers and the patient dialogue of theologians with their surrounding cultures.

A better discernment in the light of the Gospel has been made, with a greater readiness to see how the Spirit of God may be speaking through such events. In all cases discernment must carefully distinguish between elements compatible with the Gospel and those contrary to it, between positive contributions and ideological aspects, but the more acute understanding of the world that results cannot fail to prompt a more penetrating appreciation of Christ the Lord and of the Gospel¹⁰⁸ since Christ is the savior of the world.

“The ‘sensus fidelium’ does not simply mean the majority opinion in a given time or culture, nor is it only a secondary affirmation of what is first taught by the magisterium. The ‘sensus fidelium’ is the ‘sensus fidei’ of the people of God as a whole who are obedient to the word of God and are led in the ways of faith by their pastors.”

56. While the world of human culture profits from the activity of the church, the church also profits from “the history and development of mankind.” “It profits from the experience of past ages, from the progress of the sciences and from the riches hidden in various cultures, through which greater light is thrown on the mystery of man and new avenues to truth are opened up.”¹⁰⁹

The painstaking work to establish profitable links with other disciplines, sciences and cultures so as to enhance that light and broaden those avenues is the particular task of theologians, and the discernment of the signs of the times presents great opportunities for theological endeavor, notwithstanding the complex hermeneutical issues that

arise. Thanks to the work of many theologians, Vatican II was able to acknowledge various signs of the times in connection with its own teaching.¹¹⁰

57. Heeding God’s final word in Jesus Christ, Christians are open to hear echoes of his voice in other persons, places and cultures (cf. Acts 14:15-17; 17:24-28; Rom 1:19-20). The council urged that the faithful “should be familiar with their national and religious traditions and uncover with gladness and respect those seeds of the word which lie hidden among them.”¹¹¹

It specifically taught that the Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is “true and holy” in non-Christian religions, whose precepts and doctrines “often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens” all people.¹¹² Again, the uncovering of such seeds and discernment of such rays are especially the task of theologians, who have an important contribution to make to interreligious dialogue.

58. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should be in constant dialogue with the world. It should help the church to read the signs of the times, illuminated by the light that comes from divine revelation and to profit from doing so in its life and mission.

Chapter 3: Giving an Account of the Truth of God

59. The word of God, accepted in faith, gives light to the believer’s intelligence and understanding. Revelation is not received purely passively by the human mind. On the contrary, the believing intelligence actively embraces revealed truth.¹¹³ Prompted by love, it strives to assimilate it because this word responds to its own deepest questions. Without ever claiming to exhaust the riches of revelation, it strives to appreciate and explore the intelligibility of the word of God — *fides quaerens intellectum* — and to offer a reasoned account of the truth of God. In other words, it seeks to express God’s truth in the rational and scientific mode that is proper to human understanding.

60. In a threefold investigation, addressing a number of current issues, the present chapter considers essential aspects of theology as a rational, human endeavor which has its own authentic and irreplaceable position in the midst of all intellectual inquiry. First, theol-

ogy is a work of reason illuminated by faith (*ratio fide illustrata*) which seeks to translate into scientific discourse the word of God expressed in revelation. Second, the variety of rational methods it deploys and the plurality of specialized theological disciplines that result remain compatible with the fundamental unity of theology as discourse about God in the light of revelation. Third, theology is closely bound to spiritual experience, which it enlightens and by which in turn it is nourished, and of its nature it opens into an authentic wisdom with a lively sense of the transcendence of the God of Jesus Christ.

1. The Truth of God and the Rationality of Theology

61. This section considers some aspects of the history of theology from the challenges of early times to those of today in relation to the scientific nature of theology. We are to know God, to know the truth of God. "This is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (Jn 17:3).

Jesus came to bear witness to the truth (cf. Jn 18:37) and presented himself as "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6). This truth is a gift which comes down from "the Father of lights" (Jas 1:17). God the Father initiated this enlightenment (cf. Gal 4:4-7), and he himself will consummate it (cf. Rv 21:5-7).

The Holy Spirit is both the Paraclete, consoling the faithful, and the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:16-17), who inspires and illuminates the truth and guides the faithful "into all the truth" (Jn 16:13). The final revelation of the plenitude of God's truth will be the ultimate fulfillment of humanity and of creation (cf. 1 Cor 15:28). Correspondingly, the mystery of the Trinity must be at the center of theological contemplation.

62. The truth of God, accepted in faith, encounters human reason. Created in the image and likeness of God (Gn 1:26-27), the human person is capable by the light of reason of penetrating beyond appearances to the deep-down truth of things and opens up thereby to universal reality. The common reference to truth, which is objective and universal, makes authentic dialogue possible between human persons.

The human spirit is both intui-

tive and rational. It is intuitive in that it spontaneously grasps the first principles of reality and of thought. It is rational in that, beginning from those first principles, it progressively discovers truths previously unknown using rigorous procedures of analysis and investigation, and it organizes them in a coherent fashion.

"There is indeed in the church a certain 'magisterium' of theologians, but there is no place for parallel, opposing or alternative magisteria or for views that would separate theology from the church's magisterium."

"Science" is the highest form that rational consciousness takes. It designates a form of knowledge capable of explaining how and why things are as they are. Human reason, itself part of created reality, does not simply project on to reality in its richness and complexity a framework of intelligibility; it adapts itself to the intrinsic intelligibility of reality. In accordance with its object, that is, with the particular aspect of reality that it is studying, reason applies different methods adapted to the object itself. Rationality, therefore, is one but takes a plurality of forms, all of which are rigorous means of grasping the intelligibility of reality.

Science likewise is pluriform, each science having its own specific object and method. There is a modern tendency to reserve the term *science* to "hard" sciences (mathematics, experimental sciences, etc.) and to dismiss as irrational and mere opinion knowledge which does not correspond to the criteria of those sciences. This univocal view of science and of rationality is reductive and inadequate.

63. So, the revealed truth of God both requires and stimulates the believer's reason. On the one hand, the truth of the word of God must be considered and probed by the believer — thus begins the *intellectus fidei*, the form taken here below by the believer's desire to see God.¹¹⁴ Its aim is not at all to replace

faith¹¹⁵; rather it unfolds naturally from the believer's act of faith, and it can indeed assist those whose faith may be wavering in the face of hostility.¹¹⁶

The fruit of the believer's rational reflection is an understanding of the truths of faith. By the use of reason, the believer grasps the profound connections between the different stages in the history of salvation and also between the various mysteries of faith which illuminate one another. On the other hand, faith stimulates reason itself and stretches its limits. Reason is stirred to explore paths which of itself it would not even have suspected it could take. This encounter with the word of God leaves reason enriched, because it discovers new and unsuspected horizons.¹¹⁷

64. The dialogue between faith and reason, between theology and philosophy, is therefore required not only by faith but also by reason, as Pope John Paul explains in *Fides et Ratio*.¹¹⁸ It is necessary because a faith which rejects or is contemptuous of reason risks falling into superstition or fanaticism, while reason which deliberately closes itself to faith, though it may make great strides, fails to rise to the full heights of what can be known.

This dialogue is possible because of the unity of truth in the variety of its aspects. The truths embraced in faith and the truths discovered by reason not only cannot ultimately contradict one another, since they proceed from the same source, the very truth of God, the creator of reason and the giver of faith,¹¹⁹ but in fact they support and enlighten one another: "Right reason demonstrates the grounds of faith and, illumined by the latter's light, pursues the understanding of divine things, while faith frees and protects reason from errors and provides it with manifold insights."¹²⁰

65. This is the profound reason why, even though religion and philosophy were often opposed in ancient thought, from the start Christian faith reconciled them in a broader vision. In fact, while taking the form of a religion, early Christianity frequently thought of itself not as a new religion but rather as the true philosophy,¹²¹ now able to attain the ultimate truth.

Christianity claimed to teach the truth both about God and about human existence. Therefore, in their commitment to the truth, the church fathers

deliberately distanced their theology from “mythical” and “political” theology as the latter were understood at that time. Mythical theology told stories of the gods in a way that did not respect the transcendence of the divine; political theology was a purely sociological and utilitarian approach to religion which did not care about truth.

The Fathers of the Church located Christianity alongside “natural theology,” which claimed to offer rational enlightenment about the “nature” of the gods.¹²² However, by teaching that the Logos, the principle of all things, was a personal being with a face and a name, and that he was seeking friendship with humanity, Christianity purified and transformed the philosophical idea of God and introduced into it the dynamism of love (*agape*).

66. Great Eastern theologians used the encounter between Christianity and Greek philosophy as a providential opportunity to reflect on the truth of revelation, i.e. the truth of the Logos. In order to defend and illumine the mysteries of faith (the consubstantiality of the persons of the Trinity, the hypostatic union, etc.), they readily but critically adopted philosophical notions and put them in service to an understanding of faith. However, they also strongly insisted on the apophatic dimension of theology: Theology must never reduce the Mystery.¹²³

In the West, at the end of the patristic period, Boethius inaugurated a way of doing theology that accentuated the scientific nature of the *intellectus fidei*. In his *opuscula sacra*, he marshaled all the resources of philosophy in the service of clarifying Christian doctrine and offered a systematic and axiomatic exposition of the faith.¹²⁴ This new theological method, using refined philosophical tools and aiming at a certain systematization, was also developed to some extent in the East, for example by St. John of Damascus.

67. Throughout the medieval period, especially with the eventual founding of universities and the development of scholastic methodology, theology steadily became differentiated though not necessarily separated from other forms of the *intellectus fidei* (e.g. *lectio divina*, preaching). It constituted itself truly as a science, in accordance with Aristotle’s criteria of a science

set forth especially in his *Posteriora Analyticorum*: that is, by reasoning it could be shown why something was so and not otherwise, and by reasoning conclusions could be reached from principles.

Scholastic theologians sought to present the intelligible content of the Christian faith in the form of a rational and scientific synthesis. In order to do this, they considered the articles of faith as principles in the science of theology. Then theologians made use of reason to establish revealed truth with precision and to defend it by showing that it was not contrary to reason or by showing its internal intelligibility. In the latter case, they formulated a hierarchy (*ordo*) of truths, seeking which were the most fundamental and therefore the most illuminating of others.¹²⁵

“While ‘dissent’ toward the magisterium has no place in Catholic theology, investigation and questioning is justified and even necessary if theology is to fulfill its task.”

They articulated the intelligible connections between the mysteries (*nexus mysteriorum*), and the syntheses they achieved expounded the intelligible content of the word of God in a scientific way, in accordance with the demands and capacities of human reason.

This scientific ideal, however, never took the form of a rationalistic hypothetical deductive system. Rather, it was always modeled on the reality being contemplated, which far exceeds the capacities of human reason. Moreover, even though they undertook various exercises and used literary genres distinct from scriptural commentary, the Bible was the living source of inspiration for scholastic theologians — theology precisely aimed at a better understanding of the word, and St. Bonaventure and St. Thomas Aquinas thought of themselves primarily as *magistri in sacra pagina*.

The role played by the “argument from fittingness” was crucial. The theologian does not reason a priori but listens to revelation and searches the wise

ways God has freely chosen in his plan of love. Firmly based on faith, therefore, theology understood itself as a human participation in God’s knowledge of himself and of all things, “*quaedam impressio divinae scientiae quae est una et simplex omnium*.”¹²⁶ That was the primary source of its unity.

68. Toward the end of the Middle Ages, the unified structure of Christian wisdom, of which theology was the keystone, began to break up. Philosophy and other secular disciplines increasingly separated themselves from theology, and theology itself fragmented into specializations which sometimes lost sight of their deep connection. There was a tendency of theology to distance itself from the word of God, so that on occasion it became a purely philosophical reflection applied to religious questions.

At the same time, perhaps because of this neglect of Scripture, its *theo*-logical dimension and spiritual finality slipped from view, and the spiritual life began to develop aside from a rationalizing university theology and even in opposition to the latter.¹²⁷ Theology, thus fragmented, became more and more cut off from the actual life of the Christian people and ill equipped to face the challenges of modernity.

69. Scholastic theology was criticized during the Reformation for placing too much value on the rationality of faith and too little on the damage sin does to reason. Catholic theology responded by maintaining in high esteem the anthropology of the image of God (*imago Dei*) and the capacity and responsibility of reason, wounded but not destroyed by sin, and by emphasizing the church as the place where God could truly be known and the science of faith truly be developed. The Catholic Church thus kept open the possibility of dialogue with philosophy, philology, and the historical and natural sciences.

70. The critique of faith and theology made during the Enlightenment, however, was more radical. In some ways the Enlightenment had a religious stimulus. However, by aligning themselves with deism, Enlightenment thinkers now saw an irreconcilable difference between the factual contingencies of history and the genuine needs of reason. Truth, for them, was not to be found in history, and revelation, as a historical event,

could not serve any longer as a reliable source of knowledge for human beings.

In many cases, Catholic theology reacted defensively against the challenge of Enlightenment thinking. It gave priority to apologetics rather than to the sapiential dimension of faith, it separated too much the natural order of reason and the supernatural order of faith, and it gave great importance to “natural theology” and too little to the *intellectus fidei* as an understanding of the mysteries of the faith. Catholic theology was thus left damaged in various respects by its own strategy in this encounter.

At its best, however, Catholic theology also sought a constructive dialogue with the Enlightenment and with its philosophical criticism. With reference to Scripture and church teaching, the merely “instructional” idea of revelation was criticized theologically, and the idea of revelation was reshaped in terms of the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, such that history could still be understood as the place of God’s saving acts.

71. Today there is a new challenge, and Catholic theology has to deal with a postmodern crisis of classical reason itself that has serious implications for the *intellectus fidei*. The idea of “truth” seems very problematic. Is there such a thing as “truth”? Is there only one “truth”? Does such an idea lead to intolerance and violence?

Catholic theology traditionally operates with a strong sense of the capacity of reason to go beyond appearances and attain the reality and the truth of things, but today reason is often viewed weakly, as unable in principle to attain “reality.” There is therefore a problem in that the metaphysical orientation of philosophy, which was important for the former models of Catholic theology, remains in deep crisis.

Theology can help to overcome this crisis and to revitalize an authentic metaphysics. Catholic theology is interested, nonetheless, in dialogue about the question of God and truth with all contemporary philosophies.

72. In *Fides et Ratio*, Pope John Paul II rejected both philosophical skepticism and fideism, and called for a renewal of the relationship between theology and philosophy. He recognized philosophy as an autonomous science and as a crucial interlocutor for theology.

He insisted that theology must necessarily have recourse to philosophy: without philosophy, theology cannot adequately critique the validity of its assertions nor clarify its ideas nor properly understand different schools of thought.¹²⁸ Theology’s “source and starting point” is the word of God revealed in history, and theology seeks to understand that word. However, God’s word is truth (cf. Jn 17:17), and it follows that philosophy, “the human search for truth,” can help in the understanding of God’s word.¹²⁹

“Catholic theologians should recognize the competence of bishops, and especially of the college of bishops headed by the pope, to give an authentic interpretation of the word of God handed on in Scripture and tradition.”

73. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should strive to give a scientifically and rationally argued presentation of the truths of the Christian faith. For this, it needs to make use of reason, and it must acknowledge the strong relationship between faith and reason, first of all philosophical reason, so as to overcome both fideism and rationalism.¹³⁰

2. The Unity of Theology in a Plurality of Methods, Disciplines

74. This section considers the relationship between theology and theologies, and the relationship also between theology and other sciences. Catholic theology, fundamentally understood with St. Augustine as “reasoning or discourse about God,”¹³¹ is one in its essence and has its own unique characteristics as a science: Its proper subject is the one and only God, and it studies its subject in its own proper manner, namely by the use of reason enlightened by revelation.

At the very start of the *Summa Theologiae*, St. Thomas explains that everything in theology is understood with regard to God, *sub ratione Dei*.¹³² The great diversity of matters that the theologian is led to consider finds its unity in this ultimate reference to God.

All the “mysteries” contained in diverse theological treatises refer to what is the single absolute Mystery in the strictest sense, namely, the mystery of God.

Reference to this mystery unites theology in the vast range of the latter’s subject matter and contexts, and the idea of *reductio in mysterium* can be valuable as an expression of the dynamism that deeply unites theological propositions. Since the mystery of God is revealed in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, Vatican II directed that all theological treatises “should be renewed through a more vivid contact with the mystery of Christ and the history of salvation.”¹³³

75. The church fathers knew the word *theology* only in the singular. For them, theology was not “myth” but the Logos of God himself. Insofar as the human spirit is impressed by the Spirit of God through the revelation of the Logos and led to contemplate the infinite mystery of his nature and action, human beings also are enabled to do theology. In scholastic theology, the diversity of questions studied by the theologian might justify the use of various methods but it never placed in doubt the fundamental unity of theology.

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, however, there was a tendency to distinguish and even to separate scholastic and mystical theology, speculative and positive theology, and so on. In modern times there has been an increasing tendency to use the word *theology* in the plural. There is talk of the *theologies* of different authors, periods or cultures. In mind are the characteristic concepts, significant themes and specific perspectives of those theologies.

76. Various factors have contributed to this modern plurality of theologies.

—There is within theology more and more internal specialization into different disciplines: e.g. biblical studies, liturgy, patristics, church history, fundamental theology, systematic theology, moral theology, pastoral theology, spirituality, catechetics and canon law. This development is inevitable and understandable because of the scientific nature of theology and the demands of research.

—There is a diversification of theological styles because of the external influence of other sciences: e.g. philosophy, philology, history and the social, natural and life sciences. As a result, in

central fields of Catholic theology today very different forms of thinking coexist: e.g. transcendental theology and salvation historical theology, analytic theology, renewed scholastic and metaphysical theology, political and liberation theology.

—There is with regard to the practice of theology an ever increasing multiplicity of subjects, places, institutions, intentions, contexts and interests, and a new appreciation of the plurality and variety of cultures.¹³⁴

77. The plurality of theologies is undoubtedly necessary and justified.¹³⁵ It results primarily from the abundance of divine truth itself, which human beings can only ever grasp under its specific aspects and never as a whole and moreover never definitively but always, as it were, with new eyes. Then also, because of the diversity of the objects it considers and interprets (e.g. God, human beings, historical events, texts) and the sheer diversity of human questioning, theology must inevitably have recourse to a plurality of disciplines and methods,¹³⁶ according to the nature of the object being studied. The plurality of theologies reflects, in fact, the catholicity of the church, which strives to proclaim the one Gospel to people everywhere, in all kinds of circumstances.

78. Plurality, of course, has limits. There is a fundamental difference between the legitimate pluralism of theology, on the one hand, and relativism, heterodoxy or heresy, on the other. Pluralism itself is problematic, however, if there is no communication between different theological disciplines or if there are no agreed criteria by which various forms of theology are understandable — both to themselves and to others — as Catholic theology. Essential to the avoidance or overcoming of such problems is a fundamental common recognition of theology as a rational enterprise, *scientia fidei* and *scientia Dei*, such that each theology can be evaluated in relation to a common universal truth.

79. The search for unity among the plurality of theologies today takes a number of forms: insisting on reference to a common ecclesial tradition of theology, practicing dialogue and interdisciplinarity, and being attentive to preventing the other disciplines with which theology deals from imposing their own

“magisterium” on theology.

The existence of a common theological tradition in the church (which must be distinguished from tradition itself but not separated from tradition¹³⁷) is an important factor in the unity of theology. There is a common memory in theology such that certain historical achievements (e.g. the writings of the Fathers of the Church, both East and West, and the synthesis of St. Thomas, *doctor communis*¹³⁸) remain as reference points for theology today. It is true that certain aspects of prior theological tradition can and must sometimes be abandoned, but the work of the theologian can never dispense with a critical reference to the tradition that went before.

“In the nature of their task, theologians often work at the frontiers of the church’s experience and reflection. ... It is increasingly the case that theologians give an initial articulation of ‘faith seeking understanding’ in new circumstances or in the face of new issues.”

80. The various forms of theology that can basically be distinguished today (e.g., biblical, historical, fundamental, systematic, practical, moral), characterized by their various sources, methods and tasks, are all fundamentally united by a striving for true knowledge of God and of God’s saving plan. There should therefore be intensive communication and cooperation between them.

Dialogue and interdisciplinary collaboration are indispensable means of ensuring and expressing the unity of theology. The singular *theology* by no means indicates a uniformity of styles or concepts; rather, it serves to indicate a common search for truth, common service of the body of Christ and common devotion to the one God.

81. Since ancient times, theology has worked in partnership with philosophy. While this partnership remains fundamental, in modern times further

partners for theology have been found. Biblical studies and church history have been helped by the development of new methods to analyze and interpret texts, and by new techniques to prove the historical validity of sources and to describe social and cultural developments.¹³⁹

Systematic, fundamental and moral theology have all benefited from an engagement with natural, economic and medical sciences. Practical theology has profited from the encounter with sociology, psychology and pedagogy.

In all of these engagements, Catholic theology should respect the proper coherence of the methods and sciences utilized, but it should also use them in a critical fashion in light of the faith that is part of the theologian’s own identity and motivation.¹⁴⁰ Partial results, obtained by a method borrowed from another discipline, cannot be determinative for the theologian’s work and must be critically integrated with theology’s own task and argument.¹⁴¹

An insufficiently critical use of the knowledge or methods of other sciences is likely to distort and fragment the work of theology. Indeed, an overhasty fusion between faith and philosophy was already identified by the fathers as a source of heresies.¹⁴² In short, other disciplines must not be allowed to impose their own “magisterium” on theology. The theologian should indeed take up and utilize the data supplied by other disciplines, but in light of theology’s own proper principles and methods.

82. In this critical assimilation and integration by theology of data from other sciences, philosophy has a mediating role to play. It pertains to philosophy, as rational wisdom, to insert the results obtained by various sciences into a more universal vision. Recourse to philosophy in this mediating role helps the theologian to use scientific data with due care.

For example, scientific knowledge gained with regard to the evolution of life needs to be interpreted in the light of philosophy, so as to determine its value and meaning before being taken into account by theology.¹⁴³ Philosophy also helps scientists to avoid the temptation to apply in a univocal way their own methods and the fruits of their researches to religious questions that require another approach.

83. The relationship between theology and religious sciences or religious studies (e.g. philosophy of religion, sociology of religion) is of particular interest. Religious sciences/studies deal with texts, institutions and phenomena of the Christian tradition, but by the nature of their methodological principles they do so from outside, regardless of the question as to the truth of what they study; for them, the church and its faith are simply objects for research like other objects.

In the 19th century there were major controversies between theology and religious sciences/studies. On the one side it was claimed that theology is not a science because of its presupposition of faith; only religious sciences/studies could be "objective." On the other side, it was said that religious sciences/studies are anti-theological because they would deny faith.

Today these old controversies sometimes reappear, but nowadays there are better conditions for a fruitful dialogue between the two sides. On the one hand, religious sciences/studies are now integrated into the fabric of theological methods because, not only for exegesis and church history but also for pastoral and fundamental theology, it is necessary to investigate the history, structure and phenomenology of religious ideas, subjects, rites, etc.

On the other hand, the physical sciences and contemporary epistemology more generally have shown that there is never a neutral position from which to search for truth; the inquirer always brings particular perspectives, insights and presuppositions which bear upon the study being conducted.

There remains, however, an essential difference between theology and religious sciences/studies: Theology has the truth of God as its subject and reflects on its subject with faith and in the light of God, while religious sciences/studies have religious phenomena as their subject and approach them with cultural interests, methodologically prescinding from the truth of the Christian faith.

Theology goes beyond religious sciences/studies by reflecting from the inside on the church and its faith, but theology can also profit from the investigations that religious sciences/studies make from the outside.

84. Catholic theology acknowledges

the proper autonomy of other sciences and the professional competence and the striving after knowledge to be found in them, and has itself prompted developments in many sciences. Theology also opens the way for other sciences to engage with religious issues.

Through constructive critique, it helps other sciences to liberate themselves from anti-theological elements acquired under the influence of rationalism. By expelling theology from the household of science, rationalism and positivism reduced the scope and power of the sciences themselves. Catholic theology criticizes every form of self-absolutization of the sciences as a self-reduction and impoverishment.¹⁴⁴

The presence of theology and theologians at the heart of university life and the dialogue this presence enables with other disciplines help to promote a broad, analogical and integral view of intellectual life. As *scientia Dei* and *scientia fidei*, theology plays an important part in the symphony of the sciences and so claims a proper place in the academy.

85. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it attempts to integrate a plurality of inquiries and methods into the unified project of the *intellectus fidei* and insists on the unity of truth and therefore on the fundamental unity of theology itself. Catholic theology recognizes the proper methods of other sciences and critically utilizes them in its own research. It does not isolate itself from critique and welcomes scientific dialogue.

3. Science and Wisdom

86. This final section considers the fact that theology is not only a science but also a wisdom, with a particular role to play in the relationship between all human knowledge and the mystery of God. The human person is not satisfied by partial truths but seeks to unify different pieces and areas of knowledge into an understanding of the final truth of all things and of human life itself.

This search for wisdom, which undoubtedly animates theology itself, gives theology a close relationship to spiritual experience and to the wisdom of the saints. More broadly, however, Catholic theology invites everyone to recognize the transcendence of the ultimate Truth, which can never be fully grasped or mastered.

Theology is not only a wisdom in itself; it is also an invitation to wisdom for other disciplines. The presence of theology in scientific debate and in university life potentially has the beneficial effect of reminding everyone of the sapiential vocation of human intelligence and of the telling question Jesus asks in his first utterance in St. John's Gospel, "What do you seek?" (Jn 1:38; RSV).

87. In the Old Testament, the central message of wisdom theology appears three times: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps 111:10; cf. Prv 1:7; 9:10). The basis of this motto is the insight of the sages of Israel that God's wisdom is at work in creation and in history and that those who appreciate that will understand the meaning of the world and of events (cf. Prv 7ff, Wis 7ff). "Fear of God" is the right attitude in the presence of God (*coram Deo*).

Wisdom is the art of understanding the world and of orientating one's life in devotion to God. In the books of Ecclesiastes and Job, the limits of human understanding of God's thoughts and ways are starkly revealed, not so as to destroy the wisdom of human beings but to deepen it within the horizon of the wisdom of God.

88. Jesus himself stood in this wisdom tradition of Israel, and in him the revelation theology of the Old Testament was transformed. He prayed, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants" (Mt 11:25). This confounding of traditional wisdom comes in the Gospel context of the proclamation of something new: the eschatological revelation of the love of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus continues, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him," and this prefaces his famous invitation, "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt 11:27-29).

This learning comes from discipleship in the company of Jesus. He alone unlocks the Scriptures (cf. Lk 24:25-27; Jn 5:36-40; Rv 5:5), because the truth and wisdom of God have been revealed

in him.

89. Paul the Apostle criticizes the “wisdom of the world,” which sees the cross of Jesus Christ only as “foolishness” (1 Cor 1:18-20). This foolishness he proclaims to be “God’s wisdom, secret and hidden,” “decreed before the ages” and now revealed (1 Cor 2:7).

The cross is the crucial moment of God’s salvific plan. Christ crucified is the “power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:18-25). Believers, those who have “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), receive this wisdom, and it gives access to the “mystery of God” (1 Cor 2:1-2). It is important to note that, while the paradoxical wisdom of God manifested in the cross contradicts the “wisdom of the world,” it nevertheless does not contradict authentic human wisdom. On the contrary, it transcends the latter and fulfills it in an unforeseen way.

90. Christian faith soon encountered the Greek quest for wisdom. It drew attention to the limits of that quest, especially regarding the idea of salvation by knowledge (*gnosis*) alone, but it also incorporated authentic insights from the Greeks. Wisdom is a unifying vision. While science endeavors to give an account of a particular, limited and well-defined aspect of reality, highlighting the principles that explain the properties of the object being studied, wisdom strives to give a unified view of the whole of reality. It is, in effect, a knowledge in accordance with the highest, most universal and also most explanatory causes.¹⁴⁵ For the Fathers of the Church, the sage was one who judged all things in the light of God and eternal realities, which are the norm for things here on earth.¹⁴⁶ Therefore, wisdom also has a moral and spiritual dimension.

91. As its name indicates, philosophy understands itself as a wisdom or at least as a loving quest for wisdom. Metaphysics, in particular, proposes a vision of reality unified around the fundamental mystery of being; but the word of God, which reveals “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived” (1 Cor 2:9), opens up for human beings the way to a higher wisdom.¹⁴⁷

This supernatural Christian wisdom, which transcends the purely human wisdom of philosophy, takes two forms

which sustain one another but should not be confused: theological wisdom and mystical wisdom.¹⁴⁸ Theological wisdom is the work of reason enlightened by faith. It is therefore an acquired wisdom, though it supposes of course the gift of faith. It offers a unified explanation of reality in light of the highest truths of revelation, and it enlightens everything from the foundational mystery of the Trinity, considered both in itself and in its action in creation and in history.

In this regard, Vatican I said: “Reason illuminated by faith, when it seeks zealously, piously and soberly, attains with the help of God some understanding of the mysteries and a most fruitful understanding, both by analogy with those things which it knows naturally and also from the connection of the mysteries among themselves and with the final end of man.”¹⁴⁹

The intellectual contemplation which results from the rational labor of the theologian is thus truly a wisdom. Mystical wisdom, or “the knowledge of the saints,” is a gift of the Holy Spirit which comes from union with God in love. Love, in fact, creates an affective connaturality between the human being and God, who allows spiritual persons to know and even suffer things divine (*patri divina*),¹⁵⁰ actually experiencing them in their lives. This is a nonconceptual knowledge, often expressed in poetry. It leads to contemplation and personal union with God in peace and silence.

92. Theological wisdom and mystical wisdom are formally distinct, and it is important not to confuse them. Mystical wisdom is never a substitute for theological wisdom. It is clear, nonetheless, that there are strong links between these two forms of Christian wisdom, both in the person of the theologian and in the community of the church.

On the one hand, an intense spiritual life striving for holiness is a requirement for authentic theology, as the example of the doctors of the church, East and West, shows. True theology presupposes faith and is animated by charity: “Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love” (1 Jn 4:8).¹⁵¹

Intelligence provides theology with clear-sighted reason, but the heart has its own wisdom that purifies intelligence. What is true of all Christians has

a particular resonance for theologians, namely that they are “called to be saints” (1 Cor 1:2).

On the other hand, the proper exercise of theology’s task of giving a scientific understanding of faith enables the authenticity of spiritual experience to be verified.¹⁵² That is why St. Teresa of Avila wanted her nuns to seek the counsel of theologians: “The more the Lord gives you graces in prayer, the more it is necessary that your prayer and all your works rest on a solid foundation.”¹⁵³ With the help of theologians, it is ultimately the task of the magisterium to determine whether any spiritual claim is authentically Christian.

93. The object of theology is the living God, and the life of the theologian cannot fail to be affected by the sustained effort to know the living God. The theologian cannot exclude his or her own life from the endeavor to understand all of reality with regard to God. Obedience to the truth purifies the soul (cf. 1 Pt 1:22), and “the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy” (Jas 3:17).

It follows that the pursuit of theology should purify the mind and heart of the theologian.¹⁵⁴ This special feature of the theological enterprise by no means violates the scientific character of theology; on the contrary, it profoundly accords with the latter. Thus, theology is characterized by a distinctive spirituality. Integral to the spirituality of the theologian are: a love of truth, a readiness for conversion of heart and mind, a striving for holiness, and a commitment to ecclesial communion and mission.¹⁵⁵

94. Theologians have received a particular calling to service in the body of Christ. Called and gifted, they exist in a particular relationship to the body and all of its members. Living in “the communion of the Holy Spirit” (2 Cor 13:13), they along with all their brothers and sisters should seek to conform their lives to the mystery of the Eucharist, “from which the church ever derives its life and on which it thrives.”¹⁵⁶

Indeed, called as they are to explicate the mysteries of the faith, they should be particularly bound to the Eucharist, in which is contained “the whole spiritual good of the church, namely Christ himself our Pasch,” whose flesh is made liv-

ing and life-giving by the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁷ As the Eucharist is “the source and summit” of the life of the church¹⁵⁸ and “of all preaching of the Gospel,”¹⁵⁹ so it is also the source and summit of all theology. In this sense, theology can be understood as essentially and profoundly “mystical.”

95. God’s truth is thus not simply something to be explored in systematic reflection and justified in deductive reasoning; it is living truth, experienced by participation in Christ, “who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor 1:30).

As wisdom, theology is able to integrate aspects of the faith both studied and experienced and to transcend in the service of God’s truth the limits of what is strictly possible from an intellectual standpoint. Such an appreciation of theology as wisdom can help to resolve two problems facing theology today: First, it offers a way of bridging the gap between believers and theological reflection; and second, it offers a way of expanding understanding of God’s truth so as to facilitate the mission of the church in non-Christian cultures characterized by various wisdom traditions.

96. The sense of mystery which properly characterizes theology leads to a ready acknowledgment of the limits of theological knowledge, contrary to all rationalist pretensions to exhaust the mystery of God. The teaching of Lateran IV is fundamental: “Between creator and creature no similarity can be noted without noting a greater dissimilarity.”¹⁶⁰ Reason enlightened by faith and guided by revelation is always aware of the intrinsic limits of its activity. That is why Christian theology can take the form of “negative” or “apophatic” theology.

97. Nevertheless, negative theology is not at all a negation of theology. Cataphatic and apophatic theology should not be placed in opposition to one another; far from disqualifying an intellectual approach to the mystery of God, the *via negativa* simply highlights the limits of such an approach. The *via negativa* is a fundamental dimension of all authentically theological discourse, but it cannot be separated from the *via affirmativa* and the *via eminentiae*.¹⁶¹

The human spirit, rising from effects to the Cause, from creatures to the Creator, begins by affirming the

presence in God of the authentic perfections discovered in creatures (*via affirmativa*), then it denies that those perfections are in God in the imperfect way in which they are in creatures (*via negativa*); finally, it affirms that they are in God in a properly divine way which escapes human comprehension (*via eminentiae*).¹⁶²

Theology rightly intends to speak truly of the mystery of God, but at the same time it knows that its knowledge though true is inadequate in relation to the reality of God, whom it can never “comprehend.” As St. Augustine said, “If you comprehend, it is not God.”¹⁶³

98. It is important to be aware of the sense of emptiness and of the absence of God that many people feel today and that imbues much of modern culture. The primary reality for Christian theology, however, is God’s revelation. The obligatory reference point is the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In these events, God has spoken definitively by means of his Word made flesh.

Affirmative theology is possible as a result of obedient listening to the Word, present in creation and in history. The mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit is a mystery of *ekstasis*, love, communion and mutual indwelling among the three divine persons; a mystery of *kenosis*, the relinquishing of the form of God by Jesus in his incarnation, so as to take the form of a slave (cf. Phil 2:5-11); and a mystery of *theosis*, human beings are called to participate in the life of God and to share in “the divine nature” (2 Pt 1:4) through Christ, in the Spirit.

When theology speaks of a negative path and of speechlessness, it is referring to a sense of awe before the Trinitarian mystery in which is salvation. Though words cannot fully describe it, by love believers already participate in the mystery. “Although you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls” (1 Pt 1:8-9).

99. A criterion of Catholic theology is that it should seek and delight in the wisdom of God, which is foolishness to the world (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-25; 1 Cor 2:6-16). Catholic theology should root itself in the great wisdom tradition of

the Bible, connect itself with the wisdom traditions of Eastern and Western Christianity and seek to establish a bridge to all wisdom traditions. As it strives for true wisdom in its study of the mystery of God, theology acknowledges God’s utter priority; it seeks not to possess but to be possessed by God. It must therefore be attentive to what the Spirit is saying to the churches by means of “the knowledge of the saints.” Theology implies a striving for holiness and an ever deeper awareness of the transcendence of the mystery of God.

Conclusion

100. As theology is a service rendered to the church and to society, so the present text, written by theologians, seeks to be of service to our theologian colleagues and also to those with whom Catholic theologians engage in dialogue. Written with respect for all who pursue theological inquiry and with a profound sense of the joy and privilege of a theological vocation, it strives to indicate perspectives and principles which characterize Catholic theology and to offer criteria by which that theology may be identified.

In summary, it may be said that Catholic theology studies the mystery of God revealed in Christ and articulates the experience of faith that those in the communion of the church, participating in the life of God, have by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who leads the church into the truth (Jn 16:13). It ponders the immensity of the love by which the Father gave his Son to the world (cf. Jn 3:16), and the glory, grace and truth that were revealed in him for our salvation (cf. Jn 1:14); and it emphasizes the importance of hope in God rather than in created things, a hope it strives to explain (cf. 1 Pt 3:15).

In all its endeavors, in accordance with Paul’s injunction always to “be thankful” (Col 3:15; 1 Thes 5:18), even in adversity (cf. Rom 8:31-39), it is fundamentally doxological, characterized by praise and thanksgiving. As it considers the work of God for our salvation and the surpassing nature of his accomplishments, glory and praise is its most appropriate modality, as St. Paul not only teaches but also exemplifies: “Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in

Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen” (Eph 3:20-21).

Notes

¹ Vatican Council II, *Gaudium et Spes* 3. Unless otherwise indicated, quotations from Vatican II documents are taken from *Vatican Council II, Vol. I, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello Publishing Co and Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1996).

² For the latter two, see below, Paragraphs 92-94, and 10, 25-32, respectively.

³ Henri de Lubac, *Catholicism: Christ and the Common Destiny of Man* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), p. 298.

⁴ These and further International Theological Commission texts mentioned below may be found either in *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1969-1985*, ed. Michael Sharkey (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1989), or in *International Theological Commission: Texts and Documents 1986-2007*, eds. Michael Sharkey and Thomas Weinandy (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2009).

⁵ *Catholic*, with a capital “c,” refers here to the Catholic Church in which the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church founded by Christ and committed to the care of Peter and the apostles subsists (cf. Vatican Council II, *Lumen Gentium*, 8, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 1). Throughout this text, the term *theology* refers to theology as the Catholic Church understands it.

⁶ Vatican Council II, *Dei Verbum*, 2.

⁷ Pope Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* (2010), 6; cf. *Dei Verbum*, 2, 6.

⁸ *Verbum Domini*, 3.

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, scriptural quotations are taken from the New Revised Standard Version throughout.

¹⁰ *Dei Verbum*, 1; cf. St. Augustine, *De Catechizandis Rudibus* 4, 8 (*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* [CCSL] 46:129).

¹¹ *Verbum Domini*, 7; cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 108.

¹² Cf. *Dei Verbum*, 7, 11, 16.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁴ Augustine, “*Deus ... per hominem more hominum loquitur; quia et sic loquendo nos quaerit*” (*De Civitate Dei*, XVII, 6, 2; CCSL 48:567); cf. *Dei Verbum*, 12.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁷ *Verbum Domini*, 18.

¹⁸ *Dei Verbum*, 2.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 5, with reference also to Vatican I, *Dei Filius*, Ch. 3 (DH 3008).

²⁰ Cf. *Dei Verbum* 3; also, *Dei Filius*, Ch. 2 (DH 3004).

²¹ Cf. also 1 Jn 4:1-6; 2 Jn 7; Gal 1:6-9; 1 Tm 4:1.

²² Catechism, 2089.

²³ Augustine, *In Joannis Evang.*, XXIX, 6 (CCSL 36:287); also, *Sermo* 43, 7 (CCSL 41:511).

²⁴ Augustine, *Letter 120 (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [CSEL] 34, 2:704): “*Porro autem qui vera ratione jam quod tantummodo crederat intelligit, profecto praependendus est ei qui cupit adhuc intelligere quod credit; si autem non cupit et ea quae intelligendae sunt credenda tantummodo existimat, cui rei fides prorsus ignorat.*”

²⁵ Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate* XIV, 1 (CCSL 50A:424): “*Huic scientiae tribuens ... illud tantummodo quo fides saluberrima quae ad veram beatitudinem ducit gignitur, nutritur, defenditur, roboratur.*”

²⁶ Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (1998), opening words.

²⁷ Anselm, *Proslogion, Proemium* (in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. F.S. Schmitt, t. 1, p. 94). Because of the close bond between faith, hope and love (see above, Paragraph 11), it can be affirmed that theology is also *spes quaerens intellectum* (cf. 1 Pt 3:15) and *caritas quaerens intellectum*. The latter aspect receives particular emphasis in the Christian East: As it explicates the mystery of Christ who is the revelation of God’s love (cf. Jn 3:16), theology is God’s love put into words.

²⁸ Cf. in particular, Melchior Cano, *De Locis Theologicis*, ed. Juan Belda Plans (Madrid, 2006). Cano lists 10 *loci: sacra Scriptura, traditiones Christi et apostolorum, ecclesia Catholica, concilia, ecclesia Romana, sancti veteres, theologi scholastici, ratio naturalis, philosophi, humana historia.*

²⁹ *Dei Verbum*, 24.

³⁰ *Verbum Domini*, 35; cf. No. 31.

³¹ Cf. Council of Trent, *Decretum de Libris Sacris et de Traditionibus Recipiendis* (DH 1501-1505).

³² Pontifical Biblical Commission, “The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church” (1993), III, C, 1; cf. *Verbum Domini*, 33.

³³ *Dei Verbum*, 12.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 12.

³⁵ Cf. “The Interpretation of the Bible,” I, B-E.

³⁶ *Verbum Domini*, 34.

³⁷ “[S]ince sacred Scripture must be read and interpreted in the same Spirit in which it was written [eodem Spiritu quo scripta est], no less attention must be devoted to the content and unity of the whole of Scripture, taking into account the tradition of the entire church and the analogy of faith, if we are to derive their true meaning from the sacred texts” (*Dei Verbum*, 12; amended translation).

³⁸ Cf. *Verbum Domini*, 39.

³⁹ Cf. “The Interpretation of the Bible,” II, B; also Catechism, 115-118. Medieval theology spoke of the four senses of Scripture: *Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia.*

⁴⁰ *Verbum Domini*, 34.

⁴¹ On the central place of Scripture in theology, cf. St. Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, Prologue.

⁴² Vatican Council II, *Optatam Totius*, 16. Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.36, a.2, ad.1: “*De Deo dicere non debemus quod in sacra Scriptura non invenitur vel per verba, vel per sensum.*”

⁴³ *Verbum Domini*, 37.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁵ *Dei Verbum*, 21.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁴⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Cf. *Optatam Totius*, 16.

⁵² Cyril of Alexandria presented a dossier of patristic extracts to the Council of Ephesus; cf. Mansi IV, 1183-1195; E. Schwartz, ed., *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* I, 1.1, pp. 31-44.

⁵³ Cf. Augustine, *Contra Duas Epistulas Pelagianorum*, 4, 8, 20 (CSEL 60:542-543); 4, 12, 32 (CSEL 60:568-569); *Contra Iulianum*, 1, 7, 34 (PL 44, 665); 2, 10, 37 (PL 44, 700-702). Also, Vincent of Lerins, *Commonitorium*, 28, 6 (CCSL 64:187): “*Sed eorum dumtaxat patrum sententiae conferendae sunt, qui in fide et communione catholica sancte sapienter constanter viventes docentes et permanentes, vel mori in Christo fideliter vel occidi pro Christo feliciter meruerunt.*”

⁵⁴ Cf. DH 301, 1510.

⁵⁵ DH 1507, 3007.

⁵⁶ *Lumen Gentium*, 25.

⁵⁷ International Theological Commission, “The Interpretation of Dogma” (1990), B, III, 3; cf. “Theological Pluralism” (1972), Nos. 6-8, 10-12.

⁵⁸ Cf. Pope John XXIII, “Speech Opening the Vatican Council,” AAS 84(1962), p. 792; *Gaudium et Spes*, 62. For a detailed consideration of the whole question, see “The Interpretation of Dogma.”

⁵⁹ *Dei Verbum*, 10.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁶² Johann Adam Möhler, *Unity in the Church or the Principle of Catholicism, Presented in the Spirit of the Church Fathers of the First Three Centuries*, Peter C. Erb, trans. and ed. (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1996), p. 117.

⁶³ *Verbum Domini*, 7.

⁶⁴ *Dei Verbum*, 9.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 8; *Lumen Gentium*, 13, 14; *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 15, 17; *Ad Gentes*, 22.

⁶⁷ Cf. Yves Congar, *Tradition et Traditions: I Essai Historique; II Essai Théologique*, two vols. (Paris: 1960, 1963).

⁶⁸ “Scripture, Tradition and Traditions,” in P.C. Rodger and Lukas Vischer, eds., *The Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order: Montreal 1963* (New York: Association Press, 1964), No. 48, p. 52. Strictly speaking, as this document indicates, Tradition (with a capital “T”) and tradition (with a small “t”) may also be distinguished: Tradition is “the Gospel itself, transmitted from generation to generation in and by the church,” it is “Christ himself present in the life of the church”; and tradition is “the traditional process” (No. 39, p. 50).

⁶⁹ Cf. *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 6.

⁷⁰ *Lumen Gentium*, 12.

⁷¹ *Dei Verbum*, 8.

⁷² Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 35.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁷⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, Ch. 2.

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibid.*, Ch. 3.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Dei Verbum* 8; Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, IV, 26, 2.

⁷⁷ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 21, 24-25.

⁷⁸ *Dei Verbum*, 10; see above, Paragraph 30.

⁷⁹ Augustine, *Sermo* 340 A (PL 38, 1483).

⁸⁰ “The Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian” (*Donum Veritatis*) (1990), speaks of the truth given by God to his people (Nos. 2-5), and it locates “the vocation of the theologian” in direct service to the people of God so that they may have an understanding of the gift received in faith (Nos. 6-7).

⁸¹ *Dei Verbum*, 10.

⁸² The International Theological Commission addressed this question in its “Theses on the Relationship Between the Ecclesiastical Magisterium and Theology” (1975), as did the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in *Donum Veritatis*.

⁸³ Cf. *Dei Verbum*, 10.

⁸⁴ Cf. “Theses on the Relationship,” Thesis 2. Today as in the past, of course, bishops and theologians do not constitute two fully distinct groups.

⁸⁵ Cf. *Donum Veritatis*, 21.

⁸⁶ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 21-25, *Christus Dominus*, 12, *Dei Verbum*, 10.

⁸⁷ Thomas Aquinas distinguished the *magisterium cathedrae pastoralis* and the *magisterium cathedrae magistralis*, the former pertaining to bishops and the latter to theologians. More recently, *magisterium*, or *ecclesiastical magisterium*, has come to refer specifically to the first of those two meanings and is used in that sense in this text (cf. above, Paragraphs 26, 28-30, 33). While theologians do have a teaching role, which may be formally recognized by the church, it is not to be confused with or opposed to that of the bishops; cf. Aquinas, *Contra Impugnantes*, c.2; *Quaest. Quodlibet.*, III, q.4, a.9, ad 3; *In IV Sent.*, d.19, q.2, a.3, qa.3, ad 4; also *Donum Veritatis*, Footnote 27.

⁸⁸ Cf. *Donum Veritatis*, 34.

⁸⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 13-20.

⁹⁰ Cf. “The Interpretation of Dogma,” B, II, 3. Contradiction of the teaching of the magisterium at various levels by theological propositions gives rise to correspondingly differentiated negative evaluations or censures of such propositions and possible sanctions against those responsible; cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ad Tuendam Fidem* (1998).

⁹¹ Cf. “Theses on the Relationship,” Thesis 8.

⁹² Cf. *Donum Veritatis*, 21-41.

⁹³ John Henry Newman, “Preface to the Third Edition,” in *The Via Media of the Anglican Church*, ed. H.D. Wiedner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 10-57, here at 27.

⁹⁴ “Preface to the Third Edition,” pp. 29-30. “[N]ot all knowledge is suited to all minds; a proposition may be ever so true, yet at a particular time and place it may be ‘temerarious, offensive to pious ears and scandalous,’ though not ‘heretical’ nor ‘erroneous’” (p. 34).

⁹⁵ “Theses on the Relationship,” Thesis 9. The International Theological Commission also proposed guidelines for good practice in situations of dispute (cf. Theses 11-12).

⁹⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, Thesis 8.

- 97 Ibid., Thesis 8.
- 98 See below, Paragraph 83.
- 99 Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 22, 25.
- 100 Cf. *Donum Veritatis*, 11.
- 101 See, for example, Augustine, *Epist.* 82, 5, 36 (CCSL 31A:122), where he urges Jerome that in the liberty of friendship and with brotherly love they should be frank in correcting one another; also *De Trinitate*, I, 3, 5 (CCSL 50:33), where he says he will profit greatly if those who disagree with him argue their case with charity and truth and succeed in refuting his own argument.
- 102 Cf. “The Interpretation of Dogma,” C, III, 6.
- 103 Cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ut Unum Sint*, 28.
- 104 *Gaudium et Spes*, 11.
- 105 Ibid.
- 106 Ibid., 4.
- 107 Ibid., 44.
- 108 Cf. *ibid.*
- 109 Ibid.
- 110 Cf. Vatican Council II, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 43, *Unitatis Redintegratio*, 4, *Dignitatis Humanae*, 15, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 14, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 9.
- 111 Ibid., *Ad Gentes*, 11.
- 112 Ibid., *Nostra Aetate*, 2.
- 113 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q.2, a.10.
- 114 Cf. Anselm, *Proslogion*, Ch. 1: “*Desidero aliquatenus intelligere veritatem tuam, quam credit et amat cor meum*”; also Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV, 28, 51 (CCSL 50A:534).
- 115 Cf. *ibid.*: “*Non tento, domine, penetrare altitudinem tuam. ... Neque enim quaero intelligere ut credam, sed credo ut intelligam. Nam et hoc credo: quia ‘nisi credidero, non intelligam.’*”
- 116 Cf. Origen, *Contra Celsum*, Prologue, 4 (ed. M. Boret, *Sources Chrétiennes*, Vol. 132, pp. 72-73); Augustine, *City of God*, I (CCSL 47).
- 117 Cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 73.
- 118 Cf. *ibid.*, 77.
- 119 Cf. *Dei Filius*; also, Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, I, c. 7.
- 120 *Dei Filius* (DH 3019).
- 121 Cf. Justin, *Dialogus cum Tryphone*, 8, 4 (*Iustini Philosophi et Martyris Opera Quae Feruntur Omnia*, ed. C.T. Otto, *Corpus Apologetarum Christianorum Saeculi Secundi*, 2, Iéna, 1877, pp.32-33); Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos*, 31 (*Corpus Apologetarum Christianorum Saeculi Secundi*, 6, Iéna, 1851, p. 118); also *Fides et Ratio*, 38.
- 122 Cf. Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, VI, 5-12 (CCSL 47:170-184).
- 123 In reaction against the theological rationalism of “radical Arians,” the Cappadocian Fathers and the Greek theological tradition insisted on the impossibility of knowing the divine essence in itself here below, either by nature or by grace, or even in the state of glory. Latin theology, convinced that human beatitude could only consist in the vision of God “as he is” (1 Jn 3:2), distinguished rather between the knowledge of the divine essence promised to the blessed and the comprehensive knowledge of God’s essence that is proper only to God. In the constitution *Benedictus Deus* (1336), Pope Benedict XII defined that the blessed see the very essence of God face to face (DH 1000).
- 124 Cf. Thomas Aquinas, *In Boethium de Trinitate*, Prologue (ed. Leonine, t.50, p. 76): “*Modus autem de Trinitate tractandi duplex est, ut dicit Augustinus in I de Trinitate, scilicet per auctoritates et per rationes. Quem utrumque modum Augustinus complexus est, ut ipsemet dicit; quidam vero sanctorum patrum, ut Ambrosius et Hylarius, alterum tantum modum prosequuti sunt, scilicet per auctoritates; Boetius vero elegit prosequi per alium modum, scilicet per rationes, praesupponens hoc quod ab aliis per auctoritates fuerat prosequutum.*”
- 125 Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, IIa-IIae, q.1, a.7.
- 126 Ibid., Ia, q.1, a.3, ad 2.
- 127 Cf. Thomas á Kempis, *Imitatio Iesu Christi*, I, 3.
- 128 *Fides et Ratio*, 66.
- 129 Cf. *ibid.*, 73.
- 130 Cf. *Dei Filius*.
- 131 Augustine, “*De Divinitate Ratio Sive Sermo*” (*De Civitate Dei* VIII, 1; CCSL 47:216-217).
- 132 Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.1, a.7: “*Omnia autem pertractantur in sacra doctrina sub ratione Dei, vel quia sunt ipse Deus; vel quia habent ordinem ad Deum, ut ad principium et finem. Unde sequitur quod Deus vere sit subiectum huius scientiae.*”
- 133 *Optatam Totius*, 16.
- 134 Cf. International Theological Commission, “Faith and Inculturation” (1989).
- 135 Cf. *ibid.*, “Theological Pluralism” (1972).
- 136 Cf. “The Interpretation of Dogma” (1990).
- 137 See above, Chapter 2, Section 2: “Fidelity to Apostolic Tradition.”
- 138 Cf. *Optatam Totius*, 16.
- 139 Cf. “The Interpretation of the Bible.” This text serves as a valuable paradigm in that it reflects on the capacities and limitations of different contemporary methods of exegesis within the horizon of a theology of revelation rooted in the Scriptures themselves and in accordance with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.
- 140 Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.1, a.5, ad 2, where St. Thomas says of theology: “*Haec scientia accipere potest aliquid a philosophicis disciplinis, non quod ex necessitate eis indigeat, sed ad maiorem manifestationem eorum quae in hac scientia traduntur. Non enim accipit sua principia ab aliis scientiis, sed immediate a Deo per revelationem. Et ideo non accipit ab aliis scientiis tanquam a superioribus, sed utitur eis tanquam inferioribus et ancillis.*”
- 141 For example, in his encyclical letter *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), Pope John Paul called upon moral theologians to exercise discernment in their use of the behavioral sciences (esp., Nos. 33, 111, 112).
- 142 The early fathers emphasized that heresies, especially the various forms of gnosticism, often resulted from an insufficiently critical adoption of particular philosophical theories. See, for example, Tertullian, *De Praescriptione Haereticorum* 7, 3 (*Sources Chrétiennes* 46, p. 96): “*Ipsae denique haereses a philosophia subornantur.*”
- 143 Cf. Pope John Paul II, message of Oct. 22, 1996, to Pontifical Academy of Sciences plenary assembly; also, *Fides et Ratio*, 69.
- 144 Pope Benedict XVI observes a pathology in reason when it distances itself from questions of ultimate truth and God. By this harmful self-limitation, reason becomes subject to human interests and is reduced to “instrumental reason.” The way is opened for relativism. Given these dangers, Pope Benedict repeatedly proposes that faith is “a purifying force for reason itself”: “Faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly” (*Deus Caritas Est*, 2005, No. 28).
- 145 Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.1, a.6.
- 146 Cf. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XII, 14, 21; 15, 25.
- 147 Cf. *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, q.1, a.6.
- 148 Cf. *ibid.*, Ia, q.1, a.6, ad 3.
- 149 *Dei Filius*, Ch. 4.
- 150 Cf. Dionysius, *De Divinis Nominibus*, Ch. 2, 9 (in *Corpus Dionysiacum*, I. Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita *De divinis nominibus*, Herausgegeben von Beate Regina Suchla, *Patristische Texte und Studien*, 33,” p. 134).
- 151 Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *Four Hundred Texts on Love*, 2, 26 (G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, Kallistos Ware, trans. & ed., *The Philokalia*, Vol. 2, London/Boston, 1981, p. 69): “The intellect is granted the grace of theology when, carried on wings of love ..., it is taken up into God and with the help of the Holy Spirit discerns — as far as this is possible for the human intellect — the qualities of God”; also Richard of St. Victor, *De Praeparatione Animi ad Contemplationem* 13 (PL 196, 10A): *Ubi Amor, Ibi Oculus; Tractatus de Gradibus Charitatis* 3, 23 (G. Dumeige, ed., *Textes Philosophiques du Moyen Age*, 3, Paris: 1955, p. 71): “*Amor oculus est, et amare videre est*” (Richard attributes this phrase to St. Augustine).
- 152 Regarding private revelations, which are always subject to ecclesiastical judgment and which, even when authentic, have a value “essentially different from that of the one public revelation,” see *Verbum Domini* 14.

- 153 Teresa of Avila, *The Way of Perfection*, Ch. 5.
- 154 Cf. “The Interpretation of Dogma,” B, III, 4: “The theological interpretation of dogmas is not an intellectual process only. At a deeper level still, it is a spiritual enterprise, brought about by the Spirit of truth and possible only when preceded by a purification of the ‘eyes of the heart.’”
- 155 Cf. Pope Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), 1.
- 156 *Lumen Gentium*, 26; cf. Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (2003), 1.
- 157 *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.
- 158 *Lumen Gentium*, 11; cf. *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10.
- 159 *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.
- 160 Lateran Council IV (DH 806).
- 161 Thomas Aquinas, *In IV Sent.*, d.35, q.1, a.1, ad.2: “*Omnis negatio fundatur in aliqua affirmatione.*”
- 162 Cf. *ibid.*, *Quaestiones Disputatae de Potentia*, q.7, a.5, ad.2, where he gives an interpretation of the teaching of Dionysius.
- 163 Augustine, “*De deo loquimur, quid mirum si non comprehendis? Si enim comprehendis, non est Deus*” (*Sermo* 117, 3, 5; PL 38, 663); “*Si quasi comprehendere potuisti, cogitatione tua te deceptisti*” (*Sermo* 52, 6, 16; PL 38, 360). ■

Update to Bishops on Contraceptive Mandate

Cardinal Dolan

In a strongly worded letter to his fellow bishops, Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan of New York, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, charged that White House officials failed to consider the U.S. bishops' concerns that the federal mandate governing employer coverage of contraception and sterilization under the health care law violated religious freedom principles. An invitation from the White House to “work out the wrinkles” regarding the mandate either by rescinding it or at least widening the exemptions on religious grounds failed to reach an agreement, and the effort “seems to be stalled,” he said in the letter released late March 2. Cardinal Dolan said that during a recent meeting with White House officials, USCCB staff members “asked directly whether the broader concerns of religious freedom ... are all off the table.” He wrote, “They (USCCB staff) were informed that they are.” The cardinal said, “Instead, they advised the bishops' conference that we should listen to the ‘enlightened’ voices of accommodation,” pointing to a recent editorial in America magazine. The editorial in the Jesuit magazine's March 5 issue questioned whether the bishops' opposition

to the revised mandate released by the administration Feb. 10 was an issue of disagreement over government policy as opposed to an infringement of religious liberty. "The White House seems to think we bishops simply do not know or understand Catholic teaching and so, taking a cue from its own definition of religious freedom, now has nominated its own handpicked official Catholic teachers," Cardinal Dolan said. His letter follows.

Twice in recent weeks, I have written you to express my gratitude for our unity in faith and action as we move forward to protect our religious freedom from unprecedented intrusion from a government bureau, the Department of Health and Human Services. I remain deeply grateful to you for your determined resolve, to the chairmen of our committees directly engaged in these efforts — Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Bishop Stephen Blaire and Bishop William Lori — who have again shown themselves to be such excellent leaders during these past weeks, and to all our staff at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, who work so diligently under the direction of the conference leadership.

How fortunate that we as a body have had opportunities during our past plenary assemblies to manifest our strong unity in defense of religious freedom. We rely on that unity now more than ever as HHS seeks to define what constitutes church ministry and how it can be exercised. We will once again dedicate ample time at our Administrative Committee meeting next week and at the June plenary assembly to this critical subject. We will continue to listen, discuss, deliberate and act.

Thank you, brothers, for the opportunity to provide this update to you and the dioceses you serve. Many of you have expressed your thanks for what we have achieved together in so few weeks, especially the data provided and the leadership given by brother bishops, our conference staff and Catholic faithful. And you now ask the obvious question, What's next? Please allow me to share with you now some thoughts about events and efforts to date and where we might go next.

Since Jan. 20, when the final, restrictive HHS rule was first announced, we have become certain of two things:

Religious freedom is under attack, and we will not cease our struggle to protect it. We recall the words of our Holy Father Benedict XVI to our brother bishops on their recent *ad limina* visit: "Of particular concern are certain attempts being made to limit that most cherished of American freedoms, the freedom of religion."

Bishop Stephen Blaire and Bishop William Lori, with so many others, have admirably kept us focused on this one priority of protecting religious freedom. We have made it clear in no uncertain terms to the government that we are not at peace with its invasive attempt to curtail the religious freedom we cherish as Catholics and Americans. We did not ask for this fight, but we will not run from it.

As pastors and shepherds, each of us would prefer to spend our energy engaged in and promoting the works of mercy to which the church is dedicated: healing the sick, teaching our youth and helping the poor. Yet precisely because we are pastors and shepherds, we recognize that each of the ministries entrusted to us by Jesus is now in jeopardy due to this bureaucratic intrusion into the internal life of the church.

You and I both know well that we were doing those extensive and noble works rather well without these radical new constrictive and forbidding mandates. Our church has a long tradition of effective partnership with government and the wider community in the service of the sick, our children, our elders and the poor at home and abroad, and we sure hope to continue it.

Of course, we maintained from the start that this is not a "Catholic" fight alone. I like to quote as often as possible a nurse who emailed me, "I'm not so much mad about all this as a Catholic, but as an American." And as we recall, a Baptist minister, Gov. Mike Huckabee, observed, "In this matter, we're all Catholics."

No doubt you have heard numerous statements just like these. We are grateful to know so many of our fellow Americans, especially our friends in the ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, stand together in this important moment in our country. They know that this is not just about sterilization, abortifacients and chemical contraception. It's about religious freedom, the sacred right of any church to define its own

teaching and ministry.

When the president announced on Jan. 20 that the choking mandates from HHS would remain, not only we bishops and our Catholic faithful but people of every faith or none at all rallied in protest. The worry that we had expressed — that such government control was contrary to our deepest political values — was eloquently articulated by constitutional scholars and leaders of every creed.

On Feb. 10, the president announced that the insurance providers would have to pay the bill instead of the church's schools, hospitals, clinics or vast network of charitable outreach having to do so. He considered this "concession" adequate. Did this help? We wondered if it would, and you will recall that the conference announced at first that, while withholding final judgment, we would certainly give the president's proposal close scrutiny.

Well, we did — and as you know, we are as worried as ever.

For one, there was not even a nod to the deeper concerns about trespassing upon religious freedom or of modifying the HHS' attempt to define the how and who of our ministry.

Two, since a big part of our ministries are "self-insured," we still ask how this protects us. We'll still have to pay and, in addition to that, we'll still have to maintain in our policies practices which our church has consistently taught are grave wrongs in which we cannot participate.

And what about forcing individual believers to pay for what violates their religious freedom and conscience? We can't abandon the hardworking person of faith who has a right to religious freedom.

And three, there was still no resolution about the handcuffs placed upon renowned Catholic charitable agencies, both national and international, and their exclusion from contracts just because they will not refer victims of human trafficking, immigrants and refugees, and the hungry of the world, for abortions, sterilization or contraception.

In many ways the announcement of Feb. 10 solved little and complicated a lot. We now have more questions than answers, more confusion than clarity. So the important question arises, What

to do now? How can we bishops best respond, especially united in our common pastoral ministry as an episcopal conference?

For one, under the ongoing leadership of Cardinal Daniel DiNardo, Cardinal Donald Wuerl, Bishop Blaire and Bishop Lori we will continue our strong efforts of advocacy and education. In the coming weeks the conference will continue to provide you, among other things, with catechetical resources on the significance of religious freedom to the church and the church's teaching on it from a doctrinal and moral perspective. We are developing liturgical aids to encourage prayer in our efforts and plans on how we can continue to voice our public and strong opposition to this infringement on our freedom. And the Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty, that has served the conference so well in its short lifespan, will continue its extraordinary work in service to this important cause.

Two, we will ardently continue to seek a rescinding of the suffocating mandates that require us to violate our moral convictions or at least insist upon a much wider latitude to the exemptions so that churches can be free of the new, rigidly narrow definition of church, minister and ministry that would prevent us from helping those in need, educating children and healing the sick, no matter their religion.

In this regard, the president invited us to "work out the wrinkles." We have accepted that invitation. Unfortunately, this seems to be stalled: The White House press secretary, for instance, informed the nation that the mandates are a *fait accompli* (and, embarrassingly for him, commented that we bishops have always opposed health care anyway, a charge that is scurrilous and insulting, not to mention flat-out wrong. Bishop Blaire did a fine job of setting the record straight.)

The White House already notified Congress that the dreaded mandates are now published in the Federal Register "without change." The secretary of HHS is widely quoted as saying, "Religious insurance companies don't really design the plans they sell based on their own religious tenets." That doesn't bode well for their getting a truly acceptable "accommodation."

At a recent meeting between staff of

the bishops' conference and the White House staff, our staff members asked directly whether the broader concerns of religious freedom — that is, revisiting the straitjacketing mandates or broadening the maligned exemption — are all off the table. They were informed that they are. So much for "working out the wrinkles." Instead, they advised the bishops' conference that we should listen to the "enlightened" voices of accommodation, such as the recent, hardly surprising yet terribly unfortunate editorial in America. The White House seems to think we bishops simply do not know or understand Catholic teaching and so, taking a cue from its own definition of religious freedom, now has nominated its own handpicked official Catholic teachers.

We will continue to accept invitations to meet with and to voice our concerns to anyone of any party, for this is hardly partisan, who is willing to correct the infringements on religious freedom that we are now under. But as we do so, we cannot rely on off-the-record promises of fixes without deadlines and without assurances of proposals that will concretely address the concerns in a manner that does not conflict with our principles and teaching.

Congress might provide more hope, since thoughtful elected officials have proposed legislation to protect what should be so obvious: religious freedom. Meanwhile, in our recent debate in the Senate, our opponents sought to obscure what is really a religious freedom issue by maintaining that abortion-inducing drugs and the like are a "woman's health issue." We will not let this deception stand. Our commitment to seeking legislative remedies remains strong. And it is about remedies to the assault on religious freedom. Period. (By the way, the church hardly needs to be lectured about health care for women. Thanks mostly to our sisters, the church is the largest private provider of health care for women and their babies in the country.)

Bishop William Lori, chairman of our Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty, stated it well in a recent press release: "We will build on this base of support as we pursue legislation in the House of Representatives, urge the administration to change its course

on this issue, and explore our legal rights under the Constitution and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act."

Perhaps the courts offer the most light. In the recent *Hosanna-Tabor* ruling, the Supreme Court unanimously defended the right of a church to define its own ministry and services, a dramatic rebuff to the administration, apparently unheeded by the White House. Thus, our bishops' conference, many individual religious entities and other people of good will are working with some top-notch law firms who feel so strongly about this that they will represent us pro bono. In the upcoming days, you will hear much more about this encouraging and welcome development.

Given this climate, we have to prepare for tough times. Some, like America magazine, want us to cave in and stop fighting, saying this is simply a policy issue; some want us to close everything down rather than comply (in an excellent article Cardinal Francis George wrote that the administration apparently wants us to "give up for Lent" our schools, hospitals and charitable ministries); some, like Bishop Robert Lynch wisely noted, wonder whether we might have to engage in civil disobedience and risk steep fines; some worry that we'll have to face a decision between two ethically repugnant choices: subsidizing immoral services or no longer offering insurance coverage, a road none of us wants to travel.

Brothers, we know so very well that religious freedom is our heritage, our legacy and our firm belief, both as loyal Catholics and Americans. There have been many threats to religious freedom over the decades and years, but these often came from without. This one sadly comes from within. As our ancestors did with previous threats, we will tirelessly defend the timeless and enduring truth of religious freedom.

I look forward to our upcoming Administrative Board meeting and our June plenary assembly when we will have the chance to discuss together these important issues and our way forward in addressing them. And I renew my thanks to you for your tremendous fraternal support and your welcome observations in this critical effort to protect our religious freedom. ■

April 11-13

Conference: "Eucharist Without Borders: God's Welcoming Table and Comprehensive Immigration Reform." Sponsor: Celebration Magazine. Splendor Resort at Rio Rico, Ariz. <http://celebrationpublications.org/conference>

April 12-14

Annual International Conference: "Conceptions of Truth." Sponsor: Notre Dame Institute for Advanced Study. University of Notre Dame. South Bend, Ind. <http://ndias.nd.edu>

April 16-19

National Workshop on Christian Unity. Sponsor: National Ecumenical Officers Association. Theme: "The Hope of Our Calling" (Eph 1:18). Skirvin Hilton Hotel. Oklahoma City, Okla. www.nwcu.org

April 17-20

International Ecumenical Gathering: "'Where We Dwell in Common': Pathways for Dialogue in the 21st Century." Sponsor: Ecclesiological Investigations. Domus Pacis Assisi - Casa Francescana di Accoglienza. Assisi, Italy. www.assisi2012.com

*April 19-20

International Colloquium: "The Church and Islam." University of Notre Dame Institute for Church Life. University of Notre Dame. South Bend, Ind. <http://icl.nd.edu>

*April 22-25

Conference for Pastoral Planning and Council Development Annual Conference. Theme: "Revitalizing Our Mission as Church: 50 Years Since the Second Vatican Council." Catholic Theological Union. Chicago, Ill. www.cppcd.org

*April 23-24

Vatican II 50th-Anniversary Celebration Conference. Sponsors: Sacred Heart University and Paulist Press. Theme: "Universal Call to Holiness." Sacred Heart University. Fairfield, Conn. www.sacredheart.edu/VIIconference.cfm

*signifies new entry

On File

U.S. church leaders pledged to redouble efforts to support religious freedom after the Senate voted to table the Respect for Rights of Conscience Act March 1. Introduced as an amendment to a highway funding bill, the bill was tabled by a 51-48 vote, effectively killing it. The measure was defeated largely along party lines. It drew the support of three Democratic senators, Robert Casey of Pennsylvania, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Ben Nelson of Nebraska. Sen. Olympia Snowe of Maine was the lone Republican to vote against the measure. Bishop William E. Lori of Bridgeport, Conn., chairman of the U.S. bishops' Ad Hoc Committee on Religious Liberty, said in a statement after the vote that the bishops will continue their strong defense of conscience rights for all people.

Leaders of a petition drive to bring Maryland's recently passed same-sex marriage legislation to referendum expressed confidence they will collect more than the nearly 56,000 needed signatures to put the issue on the November ballot. "You are going to find that in just a few short weeks, we are going to turn in not only the signatures," said the Rev. Derek McCoy, leader of the Maryland Marriage Alliance, "but, ultimately, we are going to uphold (traditional marriage) for the citizens of Maryland." The Maryland Marriage Alliance, which has partnered with the Maryland Catholic Conference, filed

a petition with the Maryland Board of Elections Feb. 24 to be the official proponents of the referendum campaign against the same-sex marriage legislation. Gov. Martin J. O'Malley, a Catholic who sponsored the same-sex marriage legislation, helped win its passage in the House and Senate. He signed the measure into law March 1, asserting that "the way forward" is found in "greater respect of the equal rights of all, for the human dignity of all."

Terrorist attacks on Christians in Africa, the Middle East and Asia increased by more than 300 percent in a seven-year period, a Vatican official told a U.N. meeting. Archbishop Silvano M. Tomasi, the Holy See's permanent observer to U.N. offices in Geneva, told the U.N. Human Rights Council that while Christians are not the only victims, attacks on them in Africa, the Middle East and Asia "increased 309 percent between 2003 and 2010." He did not offer any specific numbers. "Approximately 70 percent of the world's population lives in countries with high restrictions on religious beliefs and practices, and religious minorities pay the highest price. In general, rising restrictions on religion affect more than 2.2 billion people," the archbishop told the council members March 1. The archbishop denounced "intolerance that leads to violence and to the killing of many innocent people each year simply because of their religious convictions."