



## Committee on Doctrine

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### AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE ON THE REPUBLICATION OF *THE TEACHING MINISTRY OF THE DIOCESAN BISHOP*

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1. *The Teaching Ministry of the Diocesan Bishop: A Pastoral Reflection* was published in 1992 as a document of the Committee on Doctrine. It remains an important and useful examination of the role of the bishop as teacher of the faith. For this reason the Committee on Doctrine has decided to republish the document in electronic form in order to make the document more widely available.

2. While the document's analysis and exposition of the teaching office of the bishop remains valid as ever, the past two decades have seen some important developments that significantly affect the way that a bishop exercises his teaching ministry in the contemporary situation. I will not address the rapid advances in technology that have transformed, and continue to transform, the means of communication in our society. That is a subject that deserves a serious study of its own. Rather, I shall briefly point to some major developments within the life of the Church in the last twenty years that have given a new shape to the ecclesial context in which a bishop exercises his teaching office in our day.

#### *A) The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

3. One of the most important developments in the life of the Church since the publication of *The Teaching Ministry of the Diocesan Bishop* in 1992 has been the publication of the universal *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. This has proved to be a fruitful resource for bishops in their teaching ministry by providing an indispensable touchstone to help the faithful recognize and appropriate sound teaching. At a time when some positions represented as Catholic theology bears little resemblance to the Church's doctrinal and moral tradition, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* testifies to the living and unchanging truth of the Gospel.

4. There is a need – at every level of Catholic education – to present clearly and convincingly the deposit of the faith. It is the responsibility of the bishops to ensure that each generation receives the faith whole and unadulterated. The Good News, forgotten by many and ignored by others, proclaims that God has sent his Son among us, that his words are the words of eternal life, that he died and rose for our salvation, that the encounter with that mystery is found in the Church today, particularly in her sacraments and especially in the Eucharist, and that the Church, guided by the successors of the Apostles, continues the authentic proclamation and interpretation of revealed truths under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. All of this teaching the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* sets forth clearly and in an unambiguous manner as a touchstone for those who seek to understand more deeply this profession of faith. The *Catechism* is a sure measure for separating “the wheat from the chaff,” truth from error.

## B) *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and Ecclesial Communion

5. Another important development has been the renewed focus on the proper relationship between bishops as teachers of the faith and those who study and teach theological disciplines in Catholic colleges and universities. Most significant here is Pope John Paul II's Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*. Although it appeared in 1990, implementation of the Constitution did not begin in earnest in this country until 1999 with the approval by the U.S. Bishops of the *Application of Ex corde Ecclesiae for the United States*.

6. *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* and the *Application* have brought to the fore the importance of ecclesial communion as the essential context within which theological research and teaching must take place. The *Application* explains:

The richness of communion illuminates the ecclesial relationship that unites the distinct, and yet complementary, teaching roles of bishops and Catholic universities. In the light of communion, the teaching responsibilities of the hierarchy and of the Catholic universities retain their distinctive autonomous nature and goal but are joined as complementary activities contributing to the fulfillment of the Church's universal teaching mission.<sup>1</sup>

In the communion of the Church we find the link between "the bishops' right and obligation to communicate and safeguard the integrity of Church doctrine" and "the right and obligation of Catholic universities to investigate, analyze and communicate all truth freely."<sup>2</sup> Communion is founded upon and reflective of one faith in the one Gospel as professed within the Catholic Church. To the extent that adherence to and expression of Catholic teaching at a Catholic university is compromised, the communion of Catholic universities with the Church's pastors is diminished.

## C) *The Hermeneutic of Reform vs. the Hermeneutic of Discontinuity*

7. This renewed understanding of the relationship of theologians and bishops within the communion of the Church is connected with the broader effort of Blessed Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI to promote a proper hermeneutic of the Second Vatican Council. Pope Benedict contrasts the "hermeneutic of discontinuity and rupture" with the "hermeneutic of reform."<sup>3</sup>

The hermeneutic of discontinuity risks ending in a split between the pre-conciliar Church and the post-conciliar Church. It asserts that the texts of the Council as such do not yet express the true spirit of the Council. It claims that they are the result of compromises in which, to reach unanimity, it was found necessary to keep and reconfirm many old things

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<sup>1</sup> National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Application of Ex corde Ecclesiae for the United States* (17 November 1999) (<http://www.usccb.org/about/doctrine/publications/ex-corde-ecclesiae.cfm>), Pt. 1, no. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address to the Roman Curia, 22 December 2005 ([www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2005/December/documents/hf\\_ben\\_xvi\\_spe\\_20051222\\_roman-curia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2005/December/documents/hf_ben_xvi_spe_20051222_roman-curia_en.html)).

that are now pointless. However, the true spirit of the Council is not to be found in these compromises but instead in the impulses toward the new that are contained in the texts.<sup>4</sup>

The Pope notes that since according to this erroneous point of view it is not necessary to adhere to the texts, but rather to pursue the "spirit" of the Council, "obviously, a vast margin was left open for the question on how this spirit should subsequently be defined and room was consequently made for every whim."<sup>5</sup>

8. Pope Benedict contrasts this attitude with the "hermeneutic of reform" that he finds expressed in the words of Blessed Pope John XXIII:

It is necessary that "adherence to all the teaching of the Church in its entirety and preciseness..." be presented in "faithful and perfect conformity to the authentic doctrine, which, however, should be studied and expounded through the methods of research and through the literary forms of modern thought. The substance of the ancient doctrine of the deposit of faith is one thing, and the way in which it is presented is another...", retaining the same meaning and message.<sup>6</sup>

The needed reform is neither simple stasis nor flux; it requires careful discernment and strenuous effort.

It is clear that this commitment to expressing a specific truth in a new way demands new thinking on this truth and a new and vital relationship with it; it is also clear that new words can only develop if they come from an informed understanding of the truth expressed, and on the other hand, that a reflection on faith also requires that this faith be lived. In this regard, the programme that Pope John XXIII proposed was extremely demanding, indeed, just as the synthesis of fidelity and dynamic is demanding.<sup>7</sup>

Even as it may be demanding, this is the way of true reform. The Pope points out that "wherever this interpretation guided the implementation of the Council, new life developed and new fruit ripened."<sup>8</sup>

#### *D) The New Evangelization*

9. Finally, in recent years the Church has become more clearly focused on the New Evangelization as the fundamental task for the Church in our era. Certainly Blessed Pope John Paul II articulated the need for the New Evangelization and provided much of the foundation for the Church's current efforts. In 1990, he identified three basic situations in which the Church's mission of evangelization is carried out. First, there is the announcement of the Good News of Christ to "peoples, groups, and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups."<sup>9</sup> Second, there is the Church's ongoing activity and pastoral care in "Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission."<sup>10</sup> Third, there is "an intermediate situation . . . where entire groups of the baptized have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel."<sup>11</sup> Here the Church needs to engage in a "new evangelization" or "re-evangelization."

10. While the Church has always been engaged in all three kinds of evangelization to some extent, Pope Benedict XVI, continuing the work of Pope John Paul II, has laid particular stress on the New Evangelization as the crucial task for our time. He points to cultural changes

which have created unexpected conditions for believers and require special attention in proclaiming the Gospel, for giving an account of our faith in situations which are different from the past. The current crisis brings with it traces of the exclusion of God from people's lives, from a generalized indifference towards the Christian faith to an attempt to marginalize it from public life.<sup>12</sup>

The Church's message does not change, but the way in which it is proclaimed must be adapted to the contemporary situation.

Throughout the centuries, the Church has never ceased to proclaim the salvific mystery of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ, but today that same message needs renewed vigour to convince contemporary man, who is often distracted and insensitive. For this reason, the new evangelization must try to find ways of making the proclamation of salvation more effective; a proclamation without which personal existence remains contradictory and deprived of what is essential.<sup>13</sup>

11. It is the hope of the Committee on Doctrine that the republication of this important document, *The Teaching Ministry of the Diocesan Bishop*, will contribute to the Church's efforts to carry out the New Evangelization, so that the Gospel may reach all our contemporaries. Our world is in need of the Gospel, for it is, as the Holy Father has explained, "the ever new proclamation of the salvation worked by Christ which makes humanity participate in the mystery of God and in his life of love and opens it to a future of strong, sure hope."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Pope John Paul II, Encyclical on the Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate *Redemptoris Missio* (7 Dec. 1990) ([www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_07121990\\_redemptoris-missio\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_07121990_redemptoris-missio_en.html)), no. 33.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, Address to Participants in the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, 30 May 2011 ([www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/benedict\\_xvi/speeches/2011/may/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20110530\\_nuova-evangelizzazione\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/speeches/2011/may/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20110530_nuova-evangelizzazione_en.html)).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.