

# Editorial

This past feast of St. Dominic, Pope Paul took the occasion of a general audience to comment on a disconcerting feature of the ferment in today's Church. The Pope senses that there is "emanating with greater strength and frequency . . . a certain feeling of uneasiness regarding religious truth, the Church's established doctrine, the Faith which is authoritatively taught and habitually professed by the Church." Even among "the higher ranks of the People of God" voices can be heard reviving "errors . . . already corrected and condemned by the Church," or claiming scientific certitude for "hypotheses . . . which question the principles, laws and traditions to which the Church is firmly bound and from which it cannot ever be separated." Others cast aspersions on the "history and structure of the Church" and advocate drastic changes whereby the Church "would end up assimilating itself to the world."

All this is not meant to indicate a reversal of the process of *aggiornamento* to which the Pope has clearly committed himself—and to which the final session of the Council now under way will hopefully provide much fresh impetus. In fact, the Pope emphasizes that the trends he is rebuking are contrary to the whole spirit of the Council; they would prevent the Church "from benefiting from those potentialities and new formulas to which the conciliar updating tends . . ." The reason for *aggiornamento* is not to assimilate the Church to the world, but to win the world for the Church—for Christ, whose Body the Church is. What the world awaits from the Church is "not complacent acquiescence in its controversial theories and its worldly ways, but rather rays of its 'light' and the vigor of its 'salt'."

In the Gospel passage to which Pope Paul is here alluding, Our Lord warned: "If the salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?" The admonition is pregnant with meaning for us who now strive for fresh theological insights of contemporary relevance. An "adapted" theology will be as worthless as tasteless salt if it merely brings us to the point where we are imprisoned by the same problems and frustrations confronting those without the Faith—those to whom we are supposed to bring the liberating truth of the Gospel. The encouragement now being given for bold new theological investigation

cannot, therefore, be taken simply as an unbridled freedom from older constraints. Rather, the new freedom imposes obligations in a sense more stringent than previous ones were. The task of bringing the Word of God to the world more effectively means that we must have a better grasp of what we are adapting. We must become not less deeply immersed in our religious and theological heritage than were our predecessors, but more.

Enthusiasm for tackling modern problems is certainly a most necessary condition for the work that must be done; but enthusiasm will not carry us far enough. Our zeal must still be according to knowledge. This means, first, a firm foundation in the sources of revelation: in the Scriptures and in Tradition. It also means that we have a continuing need for discipline and precision in theological thinking. Let us have *popular* theology, yes (this is indeed the work to which *Dominicana* is dedicated); but let "popular" retain its true meaning—"pertaining to the people"—and not be used as an excuse for shoddy theologizing. And even though we are not all expected to have the subtlety of professional theologians, we should remember that this subtlety (and the professionals who make use of it) are as vital to the Church now as ever. The business of making refinements and technical distinctions in doctrinal matters is seldom pleasant and hence seldom popular. Yet there must always be some who will do it to insure really sound advances, as well as to preserve us from the dangers of misdirected modernity which are evidently disturbing the Pope.

Finally—and this was the immediate point of Pope Paul's discourse—all the difficult work of theological adaptation must be carried on in a spirit of absolute confidence in and fidelity to the Church's teaching authority which is centered in the Chair of Peter. Our response to the efforts of the Pope and the Council will surely be more positive if we remember, from the beginning, that the supreme *magisterium* is under the special guidance of the Holy Spirit. To conceive of the Holy See or the Ecumenical Council as an instrument for executing our own cherished ideas on Church reform (a temptation to which we are probably all subject) is to invite frustration. To unite ourselves prayerfully and confidently with the *magisterium* is to make the best use of our Christian liberty and to contribute most fruitfully to the indispensable work of *aggiornamento*.