



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS
POPE JOHN PAUL II
TO THE CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH**

Friday, 24 October 1997

*Your Eminences,
Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and the Priesthood,
Dear Brothers and Sisters,*

1. It is a great joy for me to meet you at the end of your plenary assembly. In this way I can express my feelings of deep gratitude to you and my warm appreciation of the work your dicastery carries out in service to the *ministry of unity*, entrusted in a special way to the Roman Pontiff, and which is expressed primarily as *unity of faith*, sustained and constituted by the sacred deposit whose first guardian and defender is the Successor of Peter (cf. Apost. Const. *Pastor Bonus*, n. 11).

I thank Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger for his cordial words which he also addressed to me on your behalf and for his description of the topics you have examined during your plenary assembly.

It was particularly concerned with a study of the categories of truth mentioned in the conclusion of the *New Formula of the Profession of Faith*, published by this Congregation in 1989, and to a reflection on the anthropological and Christological foundation of morality, in the light of the principles confirmed in the Encyclical *Veritatis splendor*.

I would also like to express my satisfaction that the revision of the text of the *Agendi ratio in doctrinarum examine* has been brought to a positive conclusion. It is certainly an effective means of providing an ever more suitable structure for the procedure of examining writings that appear contrary to the faith.

2. Now I would like to reflect briefly on the principal subjects discussed at your meeting. Studying the order of the categories of truth of Christian doctrine, the type of assent that is owed, and the formulas for proposing adherence to them is in continuity with the theme you considered at the last plenary assembly: the value and authority of the teachings of the Church's Magisterium in service to the truth of the faith and as the firm foundation of theological research.

On that occasion, I recalled that "for a community based essentially on shared adherence to the Word of God and on the resulting certainty of living in the truth, authority for determining the content to be believed and professed is something that cannot be renounced. That this authority includes *various degrees of teaching* has been clearly stated in two recent documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: the *Professio Fidei* and the Instruction *Donum veritatis*. This hierarchy of degrees should not be considered an impediment but a stimulus to theology" (*Address*, 24 November 1995, n. 5; *L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 29 November 1995, p. 3).

Taking up this theme again with special attention contributes to a more in-depth explanation of the various degrees in which the faithful adhere to the doctrines taught by the Magisterium, so that their primary meaning and significance will always be received and preserved in their entirety. At the same time it helps to bring out ever more clearly the connection between the various truths of Catholic doctrine and the foundation of the Christian faith.

Thanks also to the clarification you have worked out in this regard, a task which has occupied your Congregation in these days, the Bishops, who inherit from the Apostles the role of "teachers and pastors", to be always exercised in communion with the Roman Pontiff (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 22), will have at their disposal a further means of preserving and promoting the deposit of faith to the benefit of the entire People of God.

3. You also put exceptional stress on moral questions, whose horizon covers the whole span of human life.

In this regard, I have already said in my first Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* that "the Church cannot abandon man, for his 'destiny', that is to say, his election, calling, birth and death, salvation or perdition, is so closely and unbreakably linked with Christ" (n. 14).

The weighty problems calling, with ever more pressing urgency, for an answer in accordance with truth and goodness can find a genuine solution only if the anthropological and Christological foundation of the Christian moral life is recovered. Indeed, the incarnate Son of God is the universal and concrete norm of Christian conduct: "he himself becomes a living and personal Law, who invites people to follow him; through the Spirit, he gives the grace to share his own life and love and provides the strength to bear witness to that love in personal choices and actions (cf. Jn 13:34-35)" (*Veritatis splendor*, n. 15). By grace, then, every individual is made to share in truth and

goodness in the One who is the image of the invisible God (cf. Col 1:15), and in fidelity to following him he is enabled to act in accordance with the freedom of a son.

The service your dicastery offers to the Successor of Peter and the Church's Magisterium helps to ensure that freedom remains always and solely "in the truth", aiding the consciences of all people, particularly the disciples of Christ, not to stray from the path that leads to man's authentic good.

The good of the human person is *to be in the truth* and *to do the truth in love*. This essential bond of "truth-goodness-freedom" seems to have been lost in large part by contemporary culture and, therefore, to lead man back to discovering it is today one of the requirements proper to the mission of the Church, called to work for the salvation of the world.

By committing yourselves to making ever clearer the essential anthropological and Christological foundation of the moral life, you will certainly help foster the conscience formation of many of our brothers and sisters, in accordance with what the Second Vatican Council taught in the Declaration *Dignitatis humanae*: "In forming their consciences the faithful must pay careful attention to the sacred and certain teaching of the Church. For the Catholic Church is by the will of Christ the teacher of truth. It is her duty to proclaim and teach with authority the truth which is Christ and, at the same time, to declare and confirm by her authority the principles of the moral order which spring from human nature itself" (n. 14).

4. Today I am particularly pleased to conclude this meeting with you by recalling St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, whom I had the joy of solemnly proclaiming a doctor of the Church last Sunday.

The witness and example of this young saint, patroness of the missions and doctor of the Church, help us to understand the intimate unity between the task of understanding and comprehending the faith and the properly missionary one of proclaiming the Gospel of salvation. By its very nature faith seeks to make itself understandable and accessible to all. Therefore, the Christian mission always strives to make the truth known, and true love of neighbour is shown in its most profound and complete form when it seeks to give its neighbour what man most radically needs: knowledge of the truth and communion with it. And the supreme truth is the mystery of the Triune God definitively and unsurpassably revealed in Christ. When missionary ardour risks growing cold, the primary reason is the loss of passion and love for the truth which the Christian faith presents.

On the other hand, knowledge of Christian truth inwardly requires and interiorly demands love for him to whom it has given its assent. The *sapiential theology* of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus shows the high road for all theological reflection and doctrinal research: the love on which "depend all the law and the prophets" is a love which strives for the truth and is thus cherished as authentic *agape* for God and man. It is important for theology today to recover the spiritual dimension that integrates the intellectual and scholarly aspect with holiness of life and the contemplative

experience of the Christian mystery. Thus St Thérèse of Lisieux, doctor of the Church, with her wise reflection nourished by the sources of Sacred Scripture and divine Tradition, in complete fidelity to the teachings of the Magisterium, shows contemporary theology the way to reach the heart of the Christian faith.

Dear brothers and sisters, in congratulating you on your commitment and on the valuable ministry you carry out in service to the Apostolic See and for the sake of the entire Church, I invoke upon each of you the special protection of Mary, Seat of Wisdom, and of St Thérèse of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face. And I cordially give you all my Blessing as a pledge of affection and gratitude.

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