

## EDITORIALS

### IS WITCH-HUNTING BEING REVIVED?

The past several months have seen the inauguration of a new theological society, the opening of yet another “strictly orthodox” Catholic college, and among some, a palpable impatience with Rome for pussyfooting it with “liberal renegades.” Further, a few periodicals show up in the mail which insist that dangerous wishy-washy theology is being bandied about.

The thread which binds these movements, colleges and periodicals together is called by their supporters “fidelity to the magisterium of the Church.” I do not believe that we should question the sincerity of the statement nor the love of the Church which motives some to bring theology “back on the track.” I would venture that these movements may serve a useful, creative purpose in their determination to challenge the more current theology.

However, what is disturbing is the fact that at least implicitly, organizations like the CTS, the CTSA, the NCEA and the majority of Catholic colleges are being branded “unfaithful” to the magisterium. (Is witch-hunting being revived?) What is most disconcerting is the perceived basis for this charge of infidelity: a lack of strict conformity to the present declarations of the Church. All, I believe, would agree that *verbal* conformity to these statements is neither desirable nor even possible if we are to explicate the faith within the varied cultures of the world. We have not been baptized into the theology of the manualists nor into the language and thought-patterns of Roman decrees. Agreed, it is of primary importance for any Catholic theologian to learn at least two “languages”—the mind set of the official magisterium and the culture and language of his people. The difficult science of hermeneutics must also be mastered. But the point is that fidelity is not to be identified with parroting the statements that issue from those who enjoy (?) the charism of the official preachers within the Church.

However, there appears to be a deeper reason for this charge of infidelity. There is disagreement on the nature of theology itself. Is the fundamental task of a theologian to support, defend and prove whatsoever is declared by the Bishops of the Church? This was taught in the Fifties (cf., *Humani Generis*) and great thinkers like Du Lubac, Congar (heroes of Vatican II!) felt the repressiveness of this stance. With due respect to the authority of the magisterium, with cautions of “offending pious ears,” is it not the duty of the theologian in fidelity to his/her charism to be a creative critic of the faith? Is it not the role of the theologian to beat new paths, to float trial balloons—not for the sake of novelty nor of notoriety—but out of love for the Truth, Jesus Christ, and

His dynamic Sacrament, the Church? A fear of the recurrence of the manualist ice-age in theology lurks in my mind when a group of exemplary Catholics begins a reactionary movement instead of discussion within the present structures of theological societies, Catholic colleges, etc. Perhaps these people do not believe that a respectful, dialogical tension between the critics of the faith—the theologians—and the official preachers of the faith—the Bishops—is a sign of vitality of the Spirit's presence among us.

Finally, many of these reactionary movements seem to be yearning for precise, clear, if not definitive concepts in theologizing. Lack of fidelity to the magisterium then seems to be implied by what is termed the “fuzziness,” the “lack of precision,” the “ambiguity” of many modern theologians. I prefer to believe that there is a more valid reason for any “lack of precision” or “ambiguity.” We have been drawn more deeply into the blinding light of the mystery of God, of Jesus, of the Church. Theology is not a “whodunit”; the mystery eternally remains. Jesus himself was caught in this alienation of language, the impossibility of finite language to bear the infinite weight of expressing God's love. That sense of dynamic mystery, of the unfathomable riches of God, is a definite aspect of modern theology (bringing us closer to the East?). We are not living in a “stage” of wonderment, of searching, which will finally end in a sigh of relief when at last we have all the answers! Rather, it is of the nature of our faith, and of theology, to be blinded by the Lord, the Light of the World. To declare, therefore, that my linguistic explanation of a truth of the faith is the final one, the one and only, is to be guilty of the heresy of my own orthodoxy. It is to attempt the impossible: to exhaust mystery which is intrinsic to the faith. Rollo May states that we are living at a time when one age is dying and the new one is not yet born. For a theologian, this is forever a fact of life. Whenever the theologian believes that the new age *has been born*, he is no longer a theologian for he has pocketed God, which—to be precise—is metaphysically impossible.

Our best wishes to the new colleges, societies and reviews which publicly boast that they are the bulwarks of the faith. Hopefully, they will become creative challenges to some positions commonly held by modern theologians. But never can we cease being dynamic searchers for understanding, demonstrating our fidelity by not shirking our difficult task within the Christian community: to be creative critics of the faith.

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