

# The Vocation and Formation of Theologians and the Teaching Office of the Bishop in the British Context

A Discussion Sponsored by the Society of St. Catherine of Siena

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## Participants

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## Summary

The vocation to the Theologian to reflect, to study, to teach, and to write is placed within the mission of the Church, as one of service to it. Examining the British context for theological work, the document discusses Government policy in higher education in relation to the often vulnerable and difficult entrustment of the theologian to truth.

The vocation of the theologian is brought more sharply into focus through a reflection on the situation of the universities in England and Wales. Catholic involvement in Higher Education institutions and Universities is discussed in the context of their participation in the secular system. Both as institutions and individual theologians, we must engage with whatever understanding of education underlies Government policy; and in our own context the proliferation of university places, the diversity of the types of courses and institutions associated with university work, and the tendency to emphasise the role of universities in terms of building economic strength, are forces with which we have to reckon. The paper addresses philosophical and theological concerns about the role and purpose of the university in human social life. Central to this is the question of what truth has become in a postmodern context, and what the Church's response can unfold.

We consider the Catholic theological voice as it emerges in our context. In particular, the place of the lay theologian, and to the most commonly ecumenical, 'lay', or secular contexts in which Catholic theologians of all states of life are working. The setting of the secular university is challenging and rigorous, often isolating when Christian theologians seek to respond as part of the Church's *missio ad Gentes*. Spiritual formation, and the fostering of communion is imperative, in cooperation with the Church's pastors and those called to form and teach the

people of God. We therefore discuss the character of pedagogy and its disciplines in relation to secular and Christian practice.

At the heart of this paper is a concern to reflect more deeply, and pastorally on the relations that do and might exist, between the Bishop and the theologian. As one whose office is one of 'sanctifying' the Bishop is also called to a particular office of teaching. The document encourages us to develop further our understanding of how this office of the Bishop by its nature calls forth dialogue and invites the participation of theologians.

Three broad areas of concern can be identified from this discussion. (1) The question of how the work and call of the theologian might be more fully taken up in service of the Church's mission. This concerns the pastoral and spiritual care of theologians, in our sometimes awkward calling, as well as fostering communion between bishops and theologians. (2) Nurturing and supporting those called to reflect, study, teach and write. (3) Development of communion among theologians.

The use of the male pronoun, where it is applied to theologians in the document for simplicity of expression, is always to be understood in an inclusive sense.

### **Summary of Proposals**

1. The calling of a colloquium to debate the discussion proposed in this document, under the direction of the Committee for Theology of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
2. As part of this colloquium, the setting out of specific proposals to strengthen the collaboration between the Bishops and theologians at national and local level. These should concentrate, not on activism – the setting up of committees and so forth – but on the means by which loving and fruitful bonds, rooted in the life of the Church and its prayer, should be founded and nurtured between those called to teach and study and those whose task it is to ensure the proper education and formation of the People of God.
3. A discussion of the means by which lay theologians in particular may be formed, and nourished in their formation.
4. That there be initiated a continuing dialogue between the Bishops, the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain and other interested groups around the issues of the Church's *missio ad gentes* as it takes place in the universities and other institutes of higher education.
5. The bonds between those who teach theology in our seminaries and Catholic theologians who teach in universities should be strengthened.
6. A discussion of the concrete means by which the Church may contribute to the discussion of the meaning of education in national life, through publications, and contributions to national forums.

## Introduction

Called out from among the peoples of the world, the Church is brought into being as a sign of God's drawing near to the world in Christ and as an expression of the oneness of humanity in its desire to know the truth by which it is redeemed.<sup>1</sup> Formed as a pilgrim people on the way to fulfilment of the promise that "we shall be like him because we shall see him as he really is",<sup>2</sup> the Church is founded upon the hope of resurrection from death into life and so lives from the pouring out of the Spirit from the end of time, that is, from out of what is yet to come. In its celebration of this future and in its teaching of the truth that is its very life, the Church draws humanity towards the light of Christ, a light by which the mind is illumined. The Church is drawn, therefore, into the mystery of Christ by which the whole person is converted, lifted up, and reconciled to God. The Church's mission lies here in carrying out God's love for the world and so sacrificially, in lifting up the world to be receptive to this love through the work of sanctification. At the service of this *missio dei* in a special way are those called to be theologians, whose vocation in faith is to seek understanding, as it has been given to the Church, always to be directed to the salvation of the world, and so through their study and writing, their teaching and prayer, they are to be committed to the unfolding revelation of truth in whatever circumstances they find themselves.

The document presented here arises from a colloquium initiated by the Society of St Catherine of Siena, meeting over several months at the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology in Cambridge, to consider various dimensions of the vocation and the formation of theologians in relation to the teaching office of the Bishop. With a particular focus on the unique features of the British situation and with a special concern for the way in which the truth of the Gospel might come to be known in the life of the academy, the members of the colloquium through careful discussion together brought this document into shape and developed its substantial points. The celebration of Mass at each meeting of the colloquium and the presence of Bishop Malcolm McMahon<sup>3</sup> throughout our deliberations exemplified the living commitment to the Church's *missio ad Gentes* which lay at the very heart of the undertaking of this work.

We now offer this reflection for discussion and consideration within the wider community of the Church. In particular, it is given to the Committee for Theology of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales, to the Catholic Theological Association, and to all interested theologians and laity, trusting that the issues upon which it touches and the questions raised will prove fruitful for the building up of the people of God and for the effectiveness of our witness to truth.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Church is in Christ as it were a sacrament, or a sign and instrument of the intimate union of the unity of the human race and its entirety with God." Dogmatic Constitution of Vatican II on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, §1. "Ecclesia sit in Christo veluti sacramentum seu signum et instrumentum intimae cum Deo unionis totiusque generis humani unitatis"

<sup>2</sup> I John 3:2.

<sup>3</sup> Chairman of the Theology Committee of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

## The Theologian and the British Context

Recent months have seen renewed interest by the British Government in developing a long-term policy for Universities, especially in England and Wales. The proposed changes to the structures of the universities, although recognising the need for diversity of provision and for a striving for excellence in academic achievement at all levels, nevertheless do not open the question of the role of the universities in the shaping of national life, in the formation and understanding of what it is to be human, and in the preservation and study of what is most precious in our history. If there is a strong emphasis on what it means to strive to extend the frontiers and boundaries of knowledge, nowhere to be found is the asking of the questions – what is knowledge, what is wisdom, what is truth, and how are we to live in truth?

In 1997 the Bishops of England and Wales reminded us that “the basic understanding of education [is] human development . . . at the heart of it is a human being within whom as far as human willfulness allows, the creator will perfect the image of his divine Son”.<sup>4</sup> At the same time we have been reminded that “man’s nature calls him to seek the truth while ignorance keeps him in servitude”.<sup>5</sup> In the struggle to discern and make plain the truth, the theologian, as the one entrusted with the task of theology, is entrusted to the searching out of truth in a special way. If, as John Paul II has said, truth “is the precondition for a true and sincere dialogue among men and women”, he has added that in the context of this quest for truth “the principal task of theology consists in this, to provide both an understanding of Revelation and the teaching of faith”.<sup>6</sup>

The theologian is entrusted to the truth in a particular way, therefore, entrusted both to its discernment and the discovery of its being and causes and to its becoming and being made manifest. It is this double nature of truth that the theologian has a special calling to witness to – truth insofar as it is wisdom, insofar as what it is that thinking (or what is often called reason and the *artes* or sciences) discovers and unfolds; and truth as it is manifest in being called in the activity of the Spirit to discover through the person of Jesus the Christ an encounter with the Father. These are then the two wings “by which the human spirit is raised up toward the contemplation of truth” which, as it were, the theologian is called in a particular way to assume and become skilled in the use of, and by which the theologian both rises and draws others up to assume.<sup>7</sup>

Yet the theologian, as the one so entrusted, finds himself especially at risk in this task. If

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bishop’s Conference of England and Wales statement *Integrate Faith and Scholarship in Briefing*, 17 July, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction on the Ecclesial Vocation of the Theologian (Donum veritatis)*, §1 in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis*, Vol. 82, Rome, 1990, p. 1550. “Inquisitio veritatis insita est in natura hominis, dum ignorantia eum in statu servitutis detinet.”

<sup>6</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, §§92, 93 in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis*, Vol. 91. “[Veritas] necessaria est ad verum sincerumque inter homines dialogum . . . Propositum princeps quod explere vult theologia in eo consistit, ut Revelationis intellectus præbeatur fideique doctrina.”

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Fides et ratio*, §1. “Fides et Ratio binæ quasi pennæ quibus veritatis ad contemplationem hominis attolitur animus.”

“theology has importance for the Church in every age” and if it is “also exposed to risks since it must strive to ‘abide’ in the truth” in taking account of the new problems which confront the human spirit,<sup>8</sup> it is the *theologian* who must often bear the anguish of this exposure to risks whilst at the same time striving to remain in the truth and pointing, both in his teaching and in his life, to where the truth remains and is yet again to be found.

Properly have the greatest amongst the theologians been declared doctors of the Church, and have been called from among all of the ranks of the People of God, from the Martyrs, the Apostles, the lay and the ordained, the secular and professed. If some have been proficient in the schools, some have rightly claimed as their first and only teacher Christ the Lord himself (this has been particularly true of those women who stand among the doctors of the Church), since those who are *doctores* are first *doctus*, ones taught, and so schooled in the Lord’s service,<sup>9</sup> and in the service of his Church. Those among us who would teach must then be first among those who would be taught. In this, the theologian, though often experiencing his vocation as a lonely task, is never alone, since he is called always to share in the life of the Church, and to share with the Church the fruits of his learning and teaching. Called to be conjoined to the body of Christ in the sacraments, and nourished also by contemplation of the word, he manifests his vocation in a special relation to the Magisterium and in the particular or local situation, to the Bishop.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Situation of the Universities in England and Wales**

The situation in England and Wales with regard to institutions of higher education is quite unusual when compared to other countries in Europe or North America. Catholics did not receive ecclesial permission to enter the universities of Oxford or Cambridge until 1895, and then only under certain conditions. While there were a number of Catholic colleges, these were vocational in character, small, and mainly for the purpose of training teachers. The Church’s official involvement in the Universities was almost entirely in the provision of chaplaincies. It is only in the post-war period, and even then towards the latter part of it, that Catholics have entered the universities in large numbers, both as students and as teachers in all subject areas.

The Church now is involved in a number of higher education institutions – Trinity and All Saints University College in Leeds for example, St. Mary’s College in the University of Surrey, Newman College in Birmingham, Plater College in Oxford, and the continued Jesuit sponsorship of Heythrop College in the University of London, as well as the presence of a number of Catholic colleges and houses of study in the University of Oxford and the Margaret Beaufort Institute of Theology in the federation of theological colleges in the University of Cambridge. Others, too, could be listed. The Missionary Institute, London at Mill Hill, the Maryvale Institute, together

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Donum veritatis*, §1. “Quovis tempore, momentum theologiæ magnum est, ut Ecclesia obtemperare possit consilio Dei . . . Cum tempore autem volvuntur, quæ magnis animorum et culturæ mutationibus obnoxia sunt, tunc theologia multo gravis habet momentum; sed etiam peculiaribus periculis premitur, quia ipsi enitendum est in veritate permanere.”

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Prologue to The Rule of St. Benedict (The Rule of St. Benedict, Minnesota, Collegeville, 1981, p. 164)*, “dominici schola servitii”.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Donum veritatis*, §21. “Theologus cum Magisterio rationes [habet].”

with the four seminaries in England and Wales (Allen Hall, Oscott, Ushaw and Womersley) are all places where, through affiliations to universities such as Durham in the Case of Ushaw, and the Catholic University of Leuven, it is possible to gain degrees, and in some cases Pontifical Degrees. There are now specific lectureships in Catholic theology in universities like Birmingham and Edinburgh. In addition to Seminary Professors, there are now an important number of Catholics teaching as theologians and philosophers in universities and colleges of higher education. Nowhere is there in Britain a Pontifical Athenæum. Catholic participation in the British Universities is always within the terms of the secular University system. This means that the discussion and meditation excited by the present Holy Father on the character of the Catholic University can only be exemplary in the British context at the present time. Nevertheless the document *Ex corde Ecclesiae* was also addressed to all “Catholic institutions of higher education engaged in instilling the Gospel message of Christ in souls and cultures.”<sup>11</sup>

The immersion of Catholic theologians in the broad context of the various kinds of higher education institutions means that Catholics are almost always working alongside other Christians and in ecumenical situations of teaching and study. Catholics have had much to gain from this rich friendship and dialogue across a wealth of traditions, as well as making our own contributions to the it.

At the same time, the Universities in England and Wales have in the last twenty years undergone a radical transformation, both in their number, their character, their size and the ways in which they are funded. This transformation is certainly not yet complete. Successive Governments have sought radically to expand the proportion of the population who receive a university education: at the same time, increasingly students and their families are being asked to bear the brunt of the costs of the education they receive. The huge expansion in the number of institutions able to bear the title university is now being complemented by a drive to allow the quality and character of these institutions to diversify, so that differences in standards and levels of provision which are already well understood will become more formalised.

Despite the expansion of the universities and the fundamental changes they are undergoing, little or nothing has been said about their purpose and place in British life. Public policy documents have tended to concentrate on the universities as places that push out the boundaries of human knowledge or seeing the universities as places that “build economic strength and social harmony”.<sup>12</sup> At best the contribution of the universities is seen as instrumentalised to achieving success in competition in international financial markets that “turn ideas into successful businesses”.<sup>13</sup> At the same time universities are praised for overcoming a situation which is no longer the “preserve of a tiny elite” without any understanding of what the inter-relationships between persons are which constitute the overall shape of a national intellectual identity in which

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Ex corde Ecclesia*, §10 in *Acta Apostolicæ Sedis*, Vol. 82, Vatican, 1990. “universa tamen amplexari vult Instituta educationis altioris, contententia scilicet ut in animos inque culturas transfundantur nuntium Christi Evangelii.”

<sup>12</sup> Statement by the Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke, in the *Preface* to the White Paper *The Future of Higher Education*, Department of Education, Training and Skills, London, January 2003, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Preface* to the White Paper *The Future of Higher Education*, p. 2.

all to some degree participate. Even talk of universities as places which uphold the ‘highest values’ of a society overlooks the fact that values themselves are constructions and projections, and that it is the very enquiry into the ways and causes of being human, the history of humanity and its deepest searching, longings and highest aspirations which is at issue. In short, universities have since their inception in the Mediæval West been places concerned with the formation of the human person, a formation whose effects have extended far beyond the boundaries of individual institutions and given shape to not just the intellectual, but also the moral endeavours – for good and ill – of whole peoples.

Inseparable from this enquiry and the contemplation and development of its fruits has been the work of the Church in demonstrating that the wisdom that has emerged as a knowledge of and concerning the being of human life has its proper home in God. Philosophy has been understood from classical times as the highest of the human sciences taken for themselves. Aristotle describes this as the enquiry into being insofar as it is being. Later this became understood as the enquiry into the reason and ground of things, exemplified by Leibniz in his definition *nichts ohne Grund*, ‘nothing is without a reason’. More recently Heidegger pursued this as the self-questioning of that being whose being is a concern for itself (the human being). If philosophy – both consciously and in ways that are taken for granted – shapes human self-understanding, then the call to faith is the call for that self-understanding to discover its true home in God.

At the heart of this enquiry into self-understanding – literally the disclosure of the human self to itself – is the formation of the human person as one who, in the course of this disclosure discovers himself to be called to a moral life. While certain sciences, concerned with technology and progress, undertake their enquiries through the exercise and distillation of experiment and of trial and error, more precious are the ways and practices of those stores of human wisdom – in former times themselves understood and named as sciences – which constitute the moral wisdom required for the good exercise and application of the sciences concerned with technique and progress. The ways and practices of the moral cannot in the same way be learnt through processes of trial and error because the human person cannot be an instrument even to himself, but require the most profound and careful deliberation in advance of the decisions they imply. Thus to identify and develop a technique – let us say in medical science as much as one in nuclear physics – is not the same as understanding the moral basis for its employment.

The present Holy Father has drawn attention to this in saying “It is essential that we be as convinced of the prior standing of the ethical over the technical, and of the antecedence of the person over things, as finally, of the spirit over the body. The cause of the human person will only be served if knowledge is conjoined to conscience”.<sup>14</sup>

It is only through a recovery of this understanding of the moral, as that which precedes and orders technical and economic success, that an alternative, indeed a challenge, to what Pope John Paul has called the “culture of death” can be posed. The Holy Father has noted that “this culture is actively fostered by powerful cultural, economic and political currents which encourage an idea

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<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, §18. “Per necessarium est omnino nobis ipsis persuadere quanto ethica ratio præstet technicæ viæ, quanto persona res ipsas antecedit, quanto spiritus denique corpus superet. Tunc dumtaxat causæ hominis consoletur, cum conscientiæ ipsi coniuncta erit scientia.” From a speech first made to UNESCO.

of society excessively concerned with efficiency”.<sup>15</sup> The Bishops have already noted that the radical dissolution of a sense of the human person as standing at the centre of the practices of formation in pedagogy is co-extensive with the ‘development of postmodernist thought’.<sup>16</sup> The intellectual tendencies named by this term all in different but related ways represent, as the Bishops acknowledge, a dissolution of an understanding of the truth, and by this very fact, indicate (albeit negatively) the fundamental relation between an understanding of truth and the enquiry into the human person. In bringing to light the very shape of the human person not only in his or her capacity for economic and technical success but also to live a moral life, concerned with and for what it means to dwell with and seek the good of others, the question of the origin and final end of this person who emerges as the holder of human wisdom is posed. Here it is that theology engages with all the turmoil and questioning of human life and enquiry, and here even more that theology is shown to have a place – a central one at that – in the home of the sciences, the university itself.

Truth has in the modern era been understood essentially as a *ground* or basis for the things that are true, and so therefore something like a *value* or a determination of correctness. With the dissolution of this understanding in postmodernity, nothing seems to have a universal ground or value, and so truth is not a basis for anything. The result of this, as Pope John Paul has noted, is that “as a consequence of the crisis of rationalism, something akin to *nihilism* has appeared”.<sup>17</sup> In postmodernity and in the context of this nihilism, truth does not disappear, but it becomes an essentially private affair. Consequently many in the contemporary situation would certainly believe themselves to be living a good or moral life, whilst not acknowledging that goodness or morality to extend beyond the domain of their immediate, personal or domestic arrangements. Indeed, contemporary concerns for the respect of otherness, of difference in the social sphere mean that many would believe that, far from having a duty to proclaim a wider morality, that they have no right to do so.

However, even before the advent of rationalism’s crisis, rationalism itself had overlooked and forgotten an essential feature of truth that was at one time taken for granted. Truth and the true is also that which gives order and assembles what it orders in such a way that at the same time as what is true in particular appears, so the whole is able to be understood. The original meaning of the word *cosmos* is not universe, the whole, but *order*, by which the whole, the universal, is able to appear and so be understood. It is for this reason that the moral may be said to be true – as that which in a particular person’s actions and deliberations nevertheless is ordered to the whole, the whole of the social. If this understanding of truth is implicit in philosophy and the sciences, the greatest among the theologians also took it for granted. Thus St. Thomas naturally assumes that in grace and through the pursuit of the good practices of the Christian life – the virtues, if you will – the whole of not just the natural but also the heavenly order will appear. For

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<sup>15</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Evangelium vitae*, Vatican, 1995, §12 “... ‘mortis cultura’. Sedulo hæc promovetur a fautoribus motuum magnorum culturalium æconomicorum politicorum, qui notionem efferunt societatis ad efficientiam propendentis.” Cf. also Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus*, Vatican, 1991, §40.

<sup>16</sup> *Integrate Faith and Scholarship*, p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, §46. “Veluti consequens discriminis rationalismi tandem *nihilismus* crevit.” Emphasis in original.

example, in order to indicate this hierarchical ordering, St. Thomas distinguishes between the way in which the plenitude of divinity appears – first in Christ, then in the saints, and then in ways proper to other creatures.<sup>18</sup> Elsewhere he speaks of how the saints, by grace, not only make progress in the spiritual life but thereby in their very persons teach those who being wayfarers, have yet further to go.<sup>19</sup>

It is here that the answer lies to the accusation that the education provided by universities constitutes the (implicitly selfish) preserve of elites. Pope John Paul has argued that the university “is immersed in human society”, and he notes, not only for the progress of individuals but for the whole of society.<sup>20</sup> In this context the university cannot simply be an opportunity for the advancement of successful businesses, and so for the extension of the concentration and expansion of wealth (with the effect all too often of producing and reinforcing the power of specific elites, especially those based on concentrations of capital), but the concentrations of learning, of study, and of research that are undertaken in the university have effects that reach out to humanise whole nations and peoples, and ultimately all of human society. That only a portion of society receive a university education or participate in the work of the universities does not mean that the effects of the university are not stretched out across the whole. In the enquiry into truth which is the proper concern of the university, and which provides the basis for the self-enquiry of the human being and also reveals to him his essential belonging to the whole, not only of humanity, but of the universe itself, the Church in her mission to evangelise stretches forward in humility to preach that one who is *the way, the truth and the life*,<sup>21</sup> who, therefore, completes and redeems the truth that is discovered by being in His very person the truth of humanity itself.

The call to a life of personal faith which is the effect of this mission can never be a purely personal or domestic affair. Whilst the contemporary situation, especially in cities and places with a wide diversity of cultural backgrounds demands considerable nuance and careful respect for people and communities with very differing backgrounds and histories, nevertheless, the struggle not simply to know but also to live by and live out the good news that is Christ the Lord can never be reduced to a personal discipline or set of private practices, divorced from everyday life. The presence of the Church and of Christians in the British Universities cannot be other than the presence of those called, not only themselves to be redeemed in Christ, but also to proclaim and witness to the redemption being wrought in them. As ones sharing in the human enquiry into truth, at the same time they are called through their faith in him who is the Truth and life, and so in the Church, to make manifest the divine fountainhead of the truth with which they are concerned.

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<sup>18</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIIa, Q. 2, art. 10, resp. ad 2. “Quod divinitatis dicitur in Christo habitasse corporaliter, scilicet tribus modis, sicut corpus habet tres dimensiones: uno modo, per essentiam, praesentiam, et potentiam, sicut in ceteris creaturis; alio modo, per gratiam gratum facientem, sicut in sanctis; tertio modo, per unionem personalem, quod est proprium sibi.”

<sup>19</sup> Cf. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, IIa IIae, Q. 83, resp. ad 11 *et passim*.

<sup>20</sup> John Paul II, *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, cf. §32. “Universitas Catholica, sicut quaevis alia Studiorum Universitas, in humana est societate collocata . . . incitatur ut efficacioris usque tum singulis tum societati culturalis progressionis instrumentum sit.”

<sup>21</sup> Cf. John, 14<sup>6</sup>.

## The Emergence of a Catholic Theological Voice

In the midst of the British university context, in all its current complexity, change, and diversity, a number of Catholics teaching and writing theology have emerged. No longer confined to seminaries or smaller colleges (often formerly for the training of teachers), the British Catholic theological voice, though small, is lively, often at the forefront of scholarship, ecumenically sensitive and engaged, and with a reputation for integrity and generosity in the dialogues within which it is engaged. Moreover this voice has increasingly been a predominantly lay voice. Even were a Pontifical theological faculty to be established in Britain in the near future, the majority of Catholics teaching and writing theology in this country would remain in the employment of secular institutions.

There is no area of theological enquiry where Catholics are not working, teaching, and writing. Even degrees in Canon Law are being awarded in two universities in Britain at the present time.<sup>22</sup> Catholics who find themselves teaching in secular institutions are often isolated individuals, not able to lay claim to the same culture of support and implicit context of faith that a Church faculty can take for granted. Nevertheless, they, as men and women of faith, often working with others no less committed to their own ecclesial communities, find themselves witnessing to the life of the Church in the midst of the difficult and troubling questions of the times.

As members of the faithful they often have difficulty in locating the vocation to teach and study, and to write, in immediate relation to the Church. Very rarely have they been accorded the opportunities to gain the wisdom and knowledge that a religious or clerical formation might have afforded them. The requirement for a spiritual formation for all the faithful, mentioned in the context of the formation of priests,<sup>23</sup> would seem to take on a special urgency for those called to be skilled in the discipline and arts of theology itself. Nevertheless for many this formation has at best been haphazard and at worst, the “relations of co-operation” spoken of in the context of the relation of theology to the Magisterium have been taken for granted and not vivified and nurtured by living connections to the Church’s pastors.<sup>24</sup>

In consequence the very tendency towards a purely private understanding of truth which has marked the understanding of the moral character of truth in the universities has been mirrored in the life and work of Catholics engaged with theology. The foundation of the *Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain* in 1984 has in some way addressed this issue, by providing opportunities for Catholics in universities, seminaries and other institutes of higher education to come together for scholarly debate in the context of prayer and fraternity. Links with the Bishops have been maintained by the officers of the Association, and Bishops have been

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<sup>22</sup> These degrees are being taught respectively at Heythrop College, University of London, and by the Law Faculty of the University of Wales at Cardiff.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, §45. “Atque, ut pro quovis christifideli omnis efformatio spiritualis centrum et unitatem reponat necesse est in eorum ‘christianos esse’ et ‘christiane vivere’ . . .”

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *Donum veritatis*, IV, A, “rationes cooperationis.”

welcomed as individual members. The Bishop's Conference have normally been represented by at least one of the bishops at its annual conference, a task undertaken for many years with kindness and delicacy by the late Bishop Brewer.

## **Pedagogy and Discipleship**

Much of the current understanding of pedagogy, in Britain especially, is driven by an appeal to method: the pursuit of specified goals in learning a subject will generate specified, quantifiable results and an outcome. Education, inasmuch as it is conceived as a process, will have outcomes which will both act as a measure against which differing students of differing ability can be measured and will thereby sift themselves into social roles and place. At the same time an understanding that what is to be learned is something which must be attended to, rather than grasped, in an attitude of humility and reserve, is being eroded. Modern teaching is too often underpinned by a view that everything is a 'resource' which can be endlessly remodelled or manipulated to satisfy immediate needs. Instead of learning as a process of assimilating something greater, and to which the one who learns must be conformed, students are increasingly being taught to see everything as series of 'problems' to which mere cleverness and expediency can always find 'solutions'.

The emphasis on method in learning, and the gradual wearing-away of a model of teaching that has at its heart the apprenticeship of the student to the teacher – discipleship in learning – is yet again evidence of the disappearance of the place of the human in what it is to learn, to study, and to teach. In the face of this Christians have long known that at the heart of discovering who we are to be in God is the practice of discipleship and the witness of the disciples the Lord gathered around him. We encounter the person of Jesus the Christ through the teaching of those disciples who became Apostles, both followers and, as followers, ones who received the commission to go out and proclaim the good news to the whole world. This going out always has at its heart a personal encounter, of those at whose hands we ourselves have received the faith, and through whom we encounter the person of Jesus Christ.

The Church knows therefore, that pedagogy cannot ever be a method, but rather has to have at its heart personal encounter. The one who teaches must himself know what it is to have studied and to have been taught. In pedagogy like this, the specificity of 'outcomes' and 'benchmarks' might be present, but is only adjunct to the real task: the leading of the student into a path on which the teacher himself has journeyed. Something of this is present when Eadmer, the faithful disciple of St. Anselm, reports that his master's earnest prayer was "that his own life might not be at variance with his speech and his writings".<sup>25</sup> In consequence, a genuinely humanising pedagogy can emerge which questions every attempt to instrumentalise learning to outcomes and methods. Such a pedagogy becomes a genuine μετ' ὄδου, the following of an open path.

Chaplaincy is just one strand of this: it is adjunct to the redeeming work of the Christian pedagogue. The essence of this will be the friendship of pedagogy, which because unfolded

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<sup>25</sup> Eadmer, *Vita Anselmi*, ed. R. W. Southern in *The Life of St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury by Eadmer*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962. "Inter hæc cum iam ut dictis et scriptis suis mores sui in nullo discordarent."

through faith will also unfold as a befriending in Christ. If the essence of teaching is discipleship, so there is a second kind of discipleship, of the community shared among theologians, among those who teach, study and write of the things of faith. Those who would fulfil their vocation as theologians should also be embraced and nurtured by those, more advanced on the way, who have themselves been teaching, studying and writing already.

The true purpose of pedagogy is first for the pedagogue to take himself into account for the sake of what is to be taught, what is to be given. For a Christian, this will also require a devotion, a concern with holiness. The example of the Lord as Teacher is to seek the becoming-divine that is becoming like Christ and so becoming to the Father, given in the coming on us of the Spirit. To become fully human for Christians is to fulfil the promise of our baptism, and so, by adoption as brothers and sisters of that one who is Son and First-born by right, to become divine, to become like Christ himself. This means it is impossible for us to announce any humanism that is not at the same time a sharing in the divine life of the Trinity.

### **The Teaching Office of the Bishop**

At the Synod of 2001, the Bishops were invited, among many other things, to consider the issue of dialogue and collaboration with theologians and the faithful. They were invited to consider the fact that “Bishops have the task of offering encouragement to theologians and the support which might help them to conduct their work in faithfulness to Divine Tradition and due regard for the necessities of the historical situation”.<sup>26</sup> This is a pastoral reflection on the words of the Code of Canon Law: “through suitable means [the Bishop] is strongly to safeguard the integrity and unity of the faith to be believed while nevertheless acknowledging a rightful freedom in the further investigation of its truth”.<sup>27</sup> This flows from the recognition that the Bishop is the teacher of doctrine in the particular Church: “the Bishops, by their episcopal consecration have received with the office of sanctifying, the offices also of teaching and ruling”.<sup>28</sup> The wording of Canon Law here suggests that teaching flows from the office of sanctification, and indicates the profound way in which teaching itself, the proclamation of the truth, is in virtue of the requirement to sanctify and so participate in the redemption of creation. In this it takes for granted a truth that the Holy Father elsewhere set out explicitly, that “it is to the holiness of the faithful that the hierarchical structure of the Church is totally ordered”.<sup>29</sup>

Because the Church is by its very nature evangelical, sent forth with divine commission to

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<sup>26</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Tenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, Vatican City, 2001, §106.

<sup>27</sup> *Codex iuris canonici*, Vatican, 1983, Canon 386, §2. “[Episcopus] integritatem et unitatem fidei credendæ mediis, quæ aptiora videantur, firmiter tueatur, iustam tamen libertatem agnoscens in veritatibus ulterius perscrutandis.”

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Codex iuris canonici*, Vatican, 1983, Canon 375, §2. “Episcopi ipsa consecratione episcopali recipiunt cum munere sanctificandi munera quoque docendi et regendi.”

<sup>29</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Vatican, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, §3. “Ceterum ad fidelium sanctitatem funditus ordinatur hierarchica Ecclesiæ constitutio.”

communicate the gospel it has received into its own heart throughout all the world, the teaching office too is in service of the *missio ad gentes*. As one who is to direct and bring together in good order this missionary effort, the Bishop stirs up a compassion for those whose minds may be opened to the light of Christ, and a most precious care for the ways in which the gospel may take root in particular situations and cultures through the witness to Truth which is the Church. An intricate and tender work is called forth here in response to this fundamental duty, which the Bishop initiates and guides, so that it always manifests in its own practices the redemption of which it speaks.<sup>30</sup>

The theologian's vocation to teach, to study and to write is not coterminous with the Bishop's office of teaching, but insofar as this vocation lives, it participates in the work and mission of the Church over which the Bishop presides. It is for this reason that theologians "by virtue of their own proper charisms" are exhorted to "trustful dialogue with Pastors, in the spirit of truth and love, which is that of the communion of the Church" in the course of seeking solutions to the difficulties of their researches.<sup>31</sup>

This dialogue could not be more critical in the current situation, marked as it is on the one hand by the drive to efficiency which is even reflected in the very methods and styles of teaching the universities are being exhorted to employ, and on the other by the absence of a clear understanding of the unity and order of the sciences and provinces of enquiry.

### **Practical Considerations**

Among the practical matters that arise from this discussion, there are broad areas of concern that we commend for attention and further consideration. The first concerns the participation of theologians in the life of the whole Church and the particular ways in which the relationship of theologians and bishops is to find practical expression. Theologians often speak of the sense of isolation within the parish that accompanies this distinctive vocation and that renders their involvement in parochial and diocesan activities both difficult to negotiate and easily misunderstood or mistrusted. To discern a way of realising some mutuality of responsibility here is a very real and pressing pastoral need. This is so for theologians themselves who require care for their souls in the midst of what can be a strenuous calling, and who as (especially lay people) may find themselves in a peculiarly awkward and lonely place, but for pastors too, whose own ministry may be more firmly undergirded and upheld by the presence and activities of theologians among them. It may not be so helpful in this context to call the theologian a 'resource' for the Church, since instrumentalisation of scholarship is one of the more troubling features of life in the academy in postmodernity. Nevertheless, along with all the faithful, the theologian too is concerned to play some part locally in the building up of the body of Christ. How this precisely may translate into practice is one of the questions that lies here.

Alongside it is the matter of the collaboration of theologians and bishops, and particularly of the

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<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Codex iuris canonici*, Vatican, 1983, Canons 781–782.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. *Donum veritatis*, §40. "Ad theologos autem quod attinet, ad ipsos etiam, vi proprii charismatis . . . in fidenti colloquio cum Pastoribus, in spiritu veritatis et caritatis, qui ad ipsam communionem Ecclesiae pertinet."

most meaningful way, given the British context outlined here, for this to be manifest in relation to the Bishops' Conference. Historically this relationship has been characterised by good will and openness of communication, such that lines of opposition have been avoided and potentially contentious issues have been handled with generosity and respect. To continue in this spirit of cooperation, consideration might be given to what visible form this should now take in the Church's structures, and perhaps what sign of recognition would be appropriate as an indication of the commission in which they share. Theologians can feel a certain frustration that their desire to be of wider service to the Church, and indeed that the deep love for the Church which informs their theological work, finds no obvious and unfolding mode of expression as things are presently organised. This may be a subject for discussion both within and between the Theological Committee of the Bishops and the Catholic Theological Association, from which existing bodies a renewal of understanding and enthusiasm for this working together might ensue.

The second concerns the formation of theologians, and in particular of those who are lay theologians, for the undertaking of this teaching. This matter extends from the responsibility of the faithful and especially of teachers to awaken and nurture this calling to the life of study and prayer which is the theologian's, and to explain the various ways in which this vocation may be realised as part of the Church's own calling. From this there arises the question of being equipped for the tasks that lie ahead and of being properly prepared for the disciplined engagement with truth which an evangelical vocation requires. The practical matter of providing spiritual guidance into this theological work alongside and in the midst of academic study cannot be overlooked, given the almost entirely secular context in which this study will be undertaken. How it is that new theologians may be drawn more fully into their own discipleship, informed by a genuine and personal pedagogy, and encouraged in the life of prayer, is crucial to the realisation of this vocation.

In addition, and increasingly in the present economic climate, there is a practical matter of securing financial support, especially at the postgraduate level, where the fees and costs of living may deter or prevent promising young theologians, who are perhaps also married and with children, from continuing their studies. The provision of professorial chairs, studentships, scholarships, bursaries, or the establishment of some kind of granting system may be helpful here. An issue then arises concerning the employment or deployment of theologians within the academy and within the Church, once study has been completed. Recent years have seen something of a decline in the number of departments and of positions within them among the British universities and colleges. While lay theologians on the whole have taken responsibility for the shape of their own careers within the academy, there is a real question about what the role of the wider Church should or could be in this process. There is need to consider the most appropriate and effective way for the Church to indicate its commitment to the continuing exercise of this vocation.

The third concerns the communion of theologians which itself is a sign of resistance to the characteristic individualism of academic culture and of promise that the world is loved from beyond itself. This communion has found recent expression in the formation of the Catholic Theological Association as an annual three-day meeting, and in the occasional involvement of some theologians in the societies established in other countries. This may not be the only form that such communion should take. It may be that smaller gatherings around difficult topics or newly issued encyclicals and/or declarations is also an effective sign, that serves to strengthen and deepen the witness of theologians in their different locations. In addition, there could develop

continuing small fellowships of a few theologians who commit themselves to study and pray together at regular intervals, a pattern that might begin to take some regional shape.

On the whole in the British context, theological conferences and study days have not yet succumbed to the convention style that is common elsewhere and that often take place without any very obvious acts of the Church in worship or public prayer. It is perhaps time for a renewed commitment to forms of gathering that confidently celebrate the friendship of Christ in which serious scholarship takes place and the future joy that beckons all theological effort into its own highest endeavours. Attention to the membership of bishops in the CTA, and invitation for them to be present, to celebrate the mass and to preach, or in other ways to exercise their pastoral care for and within theological gatherings are important for this reason. The necessary grounding of this communion in the gospel is thereby enacted and food for the ongoing journey given.

### **We Therefore Propose**

1. The calling of a colloquium to debate the discussion proposed in this document, under the direction of the Committee for Theology of the Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.
2. As part of this colloquium, the setting out of specific proposals to strengthen the collaboration between the Bishops and theologians at national and local level. These should concentrate, not on activism – the setting up of committees and so forth – but on the means by which loving and fruitful bonds, rooted in the life of the Church and its prayer, should be founded and nurtured between those called to teach and study and those whose task it is to ensure the proper education and formation of the People of God.
3. A discussion of the means by which lay theologians in particular may be formed, and nourished in their formation.
4. That there be initiated a continuing dialogue between the Bishops, the Catholic Theological Association of Great Britain and other interested groups around the issues of the Church's *missio ad gentes* as it takes place in the universities and other institutes of higher education.
5. The bonds between those who teach theology in our seminaries and Catholic theologians who teach in universities should be strengthened.
6. A discussion of the concrete means by which the Church may contribute to the discussion of the meaning of education in national life, through publications, and contributions to national forums.