811 A A New Pastoral Theology (811 B is blank except for a few word from Fred Lawrence) – delivered June 18, 1974, Lonergan Workshop

The title is 'A New Pastoral Theology,' and it is in the context of Vatican II but also in the context of a new theology. Claude Geffré, O.P., published in the last couple of years a book on a new age of theology. I have a series of subtitles, and I'll announce them as I come to them, but to give a general sketch: first, a pastoral council – the fact, Vatican II; second, the notion of a pastoral council – what does it mean? third, pastoral theology; fourth, existential theology; fifthly, the shift to the human subject; and sixthly, a series of qualifications called a 'conclusion.'

1 A Pastoral Council

There is no lack of evidence that Pope John XXIII intended the Second Vatican Council to be a pastoral council. At the solemn inauguration on October 11, 1962, he addressed the assembled bishops, and in the course of his remarks he pointed out both what was and what was not his purpose in summoning them to the Council. There was no point, he said, in their gathering together merely to repeat what anyone could find in familiar theological handbooks. Equally, there was no point in going over ancient decrees and clearing up this or that obscurity to satisfy the interest of antiquarians. What was desired was advertence to the distinction between the unchanging deposit of faith and the changing modes of its presentation to meet the needs of different times. What was required today was a fresh presentation, one that met current needs, one that fitted in with the function of the teaching office of the church, a teaching office that in the main was pastoral.

During the first session of the Council there came to light divergent views on the precise meaning of the word 'pastoral.' Pope John had no intention of entering into these

debates. His interventions were incidental, rare, pragmatic, strategic, and readily understood by the majority of the bishops. Still, a few weeks after the first session had come to an end, in responding to the Christmas greetings of the curial cardinals and prelates, Pope John harked back to his inaugural address. The inspiration he had had in calling the Council was hope for a widespread and more fervent renewal in the life of the church. It was for a new and more vigorous spread of the gospel in the whole world. He wanted our contemporaries to be made aware of the church's striving for the spiritual and, no less, the material betterment of the whole of mankind. He begged leave to repeat the point he had endeavored to make in his inaugural address on October 11. Undoubtedly a first duty of the Council was fidelity to the basic truths of the deposit of faith and of the church's teaching. But this duty was not to be fulfilled by any wrapping of one's talent in a napkin and burying it in the ground. It called for a prompt and fearless will to draw upon ancient doctrine and to apply it under the conditions of our day. The business of the Council, he then had insisted, was not the discussion of this or that topic in the fundamental doctrines of the church. It was not any elaboration of the teachings of the Fathers or of ancient or modern theologians. That sort of thing can be done very well without holding a council. What was expected was a leap forward (*un balzo innanzi*) that would set forth the faith in the mental forms and literary style of modern thought while satisfying the requirements of the teaching office, an office, he repeated, that predominantly was pastoral.

John XXIII died before the second session met. But in the first session Giovanni Cardinal Montini had shown that he understood the meaning of a pastoral council, and when he became Paul VI, he had the Council continue its work for three more years. It can be maintained, I feel sure, that the further sessions revealed how well the vast majority of the assembled bishops understood the spirit and the scope of the Council. But for present purposes it will suffice to recall the longest of the documents, 'Gaudium et Spes,' which was entitled 'A Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.'

It began with an expression of worldwide solidarity. The joy and hope, the sorrow and anguish of men today are also the joy and hope, the sorrow and anguish of the disciples of Christ. The statements of the decree were addressed not only to those that invoke the name of Christ but to the whole of mankind. Its aim was to present its conception of the role of the church in the world of today. That role included no earthly ambition. It was to be led by the Paraclete, and it was to continue the work of Christ, who came into the world not to judge but to save, not to be served but to serve.

2 The Notion of a Pastoral Council

In ecumenical councils from Nicea on, a distinction was customary between a doctrinal section that expounded the truths of faith and a disciplinary section that sought remedies for current defects and abuses. But Pope John's pastoral council seemed to evade these categories. It expounded truths but hurled no anathemas. It was concerned with concrete living but its thrust was positive rather than remedial.

The Council itself did not resolve this issue directly. But the issue, nonetheless, was a live one in the conciliar debates. There, there was a single touchstone commonly employed to settle the relevance of a topic for discussion or a proposal for an amendment. That touchstone was, Is it pastoral? Moreover, in the wings of the Council were a flock of theologians with their own notions of what was and what was not pastoral.

Let us take one answer to this question, which I happen to find particularly clear and penetrating. It is from the pen of Marie-Dominique Chenu, O.P., and it was written in January 1963, that is, just a few weeks after the first session of the council closed. In April of that year it appeared in the review *Parole et mission*, and a year later it was included in a two-volume collection of Fr Chenu's writings.

After noting that in the council the term 'pastoral' had functioned as the criterion of the truths to be formulated and promulgated, he set forth the views of Cardinal Siri on

the topic. For the cardinal, ‘pastoral’ did not mean mere smiles and condescension. First and foremost, it meant presenting the truths revealed by our Lord. Further, since every council had conceived its aim to be the presentation of revealed truths, the term ‘pastoral’ could not be the distinguishing mark of any council.

Fr Chenu felt that some such opinion underlay the work of the pre-conciliar committees. Theirs had been the task of putting together the suggestions, the requests, the plaints of the bishops, and of presenting initial drafts, named schemata, for the council to approve, modify, or reject. In fact, however, the Council had rejected more than one of these schemata, pronouncing them to be abstract and Scholastic, and neither biblical nor pastoral nor ecumenical.

What, then, does ‘pastoral’ mean? For Fr Chenu, difficulty arises from putting the cart before the horse. If first one clarifies the meaning of doctrines and then sets about explaining the meaning of ‘pastoral,’ one tends to reduce ‘pastoral’ to the application of a doctrine, and to reduce the application of doctrine to the devices and dodges, the simplifications and elaborations, of classical oratory. But what comes first in fact is the word of God. The task of the church is the kerygma, announcing the good news, preaching the gospel. That preaching is pastoral. It is the concrete reality. From it one may abstract doctrines, and theologians may work the doctrines into conceptual systems. But the doctrines and systems, however valuable and true, are but the skeleton of the original message. A word is the word of a person, but doctrine objectifies and depersonalizes. The word of God comes to us through the God-man. The church has to mediate to the world not just a doctrine but the living Christ.

God spoke in the prophets, he spoke in his Son, he still speaks today in scripture and tradition, in the biblical movement, the liturgical movement, the catechetical movement, the ecumenical movement. First and foremost he speaks to the poor, to the poor in the underdeveloped nations, to the poor in the slums of industrialized nations. And if the word of God is not preached to the poor, then the church has failed. So it was

in the theme of the word of God preached to the poor – a theme so lucidly and powerfully set forth by, among others, Cardinal Lercaro – that the bishops, assembled in council, together discovered and collectively responded to the momentous meaning of the phrase ‘a pastoral council.’

Alive, personal, communal, the word of God also is historic. As the old covenant, so also the new names a dispensation, an economy, an ongoing disposition of divine providence both emergent in human history and carrying it forward to an ultimate, an eschatological goal. With its origins in the distant past and its term in an unknown future, its scope extends to the ends of the earth and its mission to all men. Once more there comes to light the complete inadequacy of attempting to begin from doctrines and then attempting to flesh them out into living speech, when it is living speech that, from the start, alone can be at once concrete and alive, interpersonal and communal, historic and ecumenical.

Let me add just one more point from Fr Chenu’s account. An ideology can be expressed in the propositions of a doctrine, in the premises and multitudinous conclusions of a system. But the words of a pastor, of a shepherd of souls, are far more than any ideology. They are words spoken in faith, and awakening faith. They are words of salvation, a salvation that is God’s gift of himself, of his peace and joy, of his eternal hope.

3 Pastoral Theology

On December 7, 1965, at the end of the council, there was promulgated the ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.’ (The Latin for ‘the modern world’ is ‘the world of our time,’ huius temporis.) One may well regard it as, by and large, a vindication of Fr Chenu’s conception of a pastoral council. But there is a further aspect to the matter, and to this we must now attend. When one thinks or speaks of a pastoral

constitution on the church, one is employing the word ‘pastoral’ in a far broader, a far more comprehensive sense, than the sense commonly envisaged by pastoral theology.

There is a material difference between the pastoral operations of the whole church in the world and, on the other hand, the operations of a pastor in his parish. There is as well the formal difference between the view propounded by Fr Chenu and the view attributed to Cardinal Siri. But, however much one may prefer Fr Chenu’s word of God as already alive to Cardinal Siri’s efforts to bring to life doctrinal abstractions, it remains that the Cardinal’s position corresponds to traditional views on pastoral theology. For the traditional position very much was a matter of learning one’s historical, fundamental, doctrinal, systematic, and moral theology, and then perhaps devoting some thought to the arts of human communication.

In fact, this view at times seems to have been pushed to incredible extremes. In 1953 I was teaching in Rome, and for the first time was directing a doctoral dissertation. The candidate was a young priest from France, and for some time I was puzzled by his complaints about the irrelevance of theology to preaching. Eventually, I grasped the point to his remarks and said, ‘No one in a sermon presents a thesis taken out of a theological textbook.’ He answered, briefly and appositely, ‘In France, one does – one has to!’ At the time I missed the more recent implications of his reply. Preaching can become, not just the application of doctrine, but doctrine pure and simple. It is preaching as an arid event, an event that necessitates a pastoral council. This larger issue was bound to come to the fore when the adjective ‘pastoral’ was shifted from the priest in his parish to the church in the world. Such a shift had had its forerunners long before the Council. In 1841 Anton Graf (1811-1867) at Tübingen had published an account of what he preferred to name ‘practical theology.’ It was concerned with the activity of the church as a whole and in its several parts; and it sought to overcome the myopia that concentrated on the pastor, presented the unrelated multiplicity of his tasks, and overlooked the originating, coordinating, and supporting activities of other members in the body of the church.

Unfortunately, Graf's ideas were taken over by a Joseph Amberger (1816-1889), who divided practical theology into two parts: one part was pastoral theology in the traditional sense, treating the tasks of the priest in his parish; the other part was handed over to canon law where, naturally enough, it remained canon law.

In our own century, two works by Franz Xaver Arnold, in 1949 and 1956 respectively, restored the approach to pastoral theology through practical theology, and in 1960, when word of the Council was in the air, Karl Rahner had printed as a manuscript a paper entitled 'Plan and Sketch of a Handbook of Pastoral Theology.' The plan was grandiose, and its execution was both rapid and massive. A group of five editors sorted out the tasks, solicited the collaboration, and assembled the contributions, of a host of specialists in theology, in the human sciences, and in relevant interdisciplinary fields. A first, thick volume appeared in 1964, a second and double volume in 1966, a third volume in 1968, and a fourth in 1970. Also in 1970 there came out a second edition of the first volume, and an index of the whole work was promised.

A mere inventory of the many excellent points made in these volumes would occupy a whole series of lectures. Even then an independent evaluation could not be attempted without first setting up its own criteria. Accordingly, it seems best at this juncture to describe a distinct but similar venture that is at once more broadly based, more massive, and, because ongoing, more fluid and more adaptable to the multitudinous and multiform eventualities of our age. I refer to the post-conciliar periodical *Concilium*.

The center of the stage in the Second Vatican Council was held by some twenty-three hundred bishops who, in the course of four years, revised and rewrote and by large majorities approved some sixteen documents. But behind the scenes there also labored some hundreds of theologians. They came from many countries. All made their contribution great or small. And when finally the council came to a close, it was natural enough for them to feel that the episode in their lives occasioned by the Council, the give-and-take of four years of discussions, the sharpening and refashioning of mind that

came about in so intimate and intense a milieu, should not suddenly and irrevocably come to an end.

So, one surmises, was founded *Concilium*. It was to be in many ways a continuation of the type of work done by theologians during the Council. It was addressed to those carrying out pastoral tasks within the church. It took its stand on the lessons learnt or reinforced during the Council, namely, that theology has much to learn from pastoral practice, that no less current pastoral practice cannot be content with the theology learnt by pastors years ago. More basically, it stood for the view that a new theology was coming into being, that its distinguishing marks admitted no brief description or summary sketch, that it was to be the as yet unformulated resultant of taking one's stand on scripture and on the history of salvation, while humbly yet courageously confronting the problems of our time.

Such was the general orientation set forth over the names of Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx in the preface to the first volume of the new series, *Concilium*. In the nine years since the series began publication, well over eighty volumes have appeared. Under the guidance of a general editorial board, each volume had its own editorial committee, and these committees were drawn from an initial three hundred thinkers and writers in twenty-six countries. Each volume has been confined to some one of nine areas in theology. Each has been published in English, German, French, Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, with at times partial publication in Polish and Japanese. Finally, each volume might fairly be described as somewhat left of center.

Together they operate on the assumption that the redemptive work of Christ is carried on not exclusively by individual pastors of souls but by all members of Christ's mystical body. It follows that this work is to be performed by all, at times as individuals, at times as members of this or that larger or smaller group, at times as members or as officials of the whole body. Further, this work is to be performed not in a vacuum but in the concrete situations that condition the lives of individuals, of groups, of the whole of

humanity. And since there is no divine revelation on what each of these successive situations are, what is possible in them, what would be the probable outcome of this or that initiative, there is required an ongoing practical or pastoral theology concerned with apprehending and understanding situations, settling policies, working out plans, seeing to their implementation, and examining the feedback that may lead to an adjustment of policies or a revision of plans.

4 Existential Theology

In the third volume of *Concilium*, Heinz Schuster referred to such a practical or pastoral theology as an existential ecclesiology. The word 'ecclesiology,' despite its Greek roots, occasions no difficulty; it simply denotes a doctrine concerned with the church. But the adjective 'existential' may be found highly ambiguous. Is it the implicit existentialism of Kierkegaard, the existentialism disavowed by Heidegger, the existentialism proclaimed by Sartre, or some other variety?

A positive or, rather, a definite answer to any of those questions would, I fear, risk being misleading. For one might arrive at some doctrine or other in the sense that we found Fr Chenu urging that doctrine was not enough. One arrives at the existential, first of all, when one arrives at oneself – at oneself not asleep but awake, not heavy-eyed but attentive, not obtuse but trying to understand and in some measure succeeding, not irrational but both yielding to what evidence there is and not going a millimeter beyond it, not amoral but responsibly evaluating and freely deciding. Such one is when authentically human, when one's existing is the existing proper to a human being.

But as one can exist as a human being, so too a human being can exist as a Christian. That is the existing of one whose heart is flooded by God's love through the Holy Spirit given him or her (Romans 5.5). It is a being-in-love manifested, to the discerning, in joy and peace, patience and kindness, goodness and fidelity, gentleness and

self-control (Galatians 5.22). It is a being-in-love that is eschatological, looking towards a last end in hope, that responds with faith to the preaching of the gospel, that joins with all the faithful in desiring and praying for and contributing to the human destiny we name salvation, a salvation that consists in God's gift of himself to us in this life and, more fully and overtly, in the next.

At the risk of being tedious, let me insist: existing does not reside in the words I have used; it does not reside in grasping the meaning of such words; it does not reside in any object intended as object. It resides in the subject that may or may not use the words, that may or may not understand what the words mean, but that lives the reality that is meant. Such living is the luminous experience out of which accounts of authentic human and authentic Christian experience may come. Such living is the source from which there springs a genuine response to such accounts.

Now it happens that this is a topic to which we have already adverted. We did so prior to the present context and, to some extent, in different language. But many of you no doubt have found that my present point has been echoing Fr Chenu's paper on a pastoral council and, in particular, his contrast of the doctrinal with the pastoral. For it is authentic Christian experience that is alive. It is that experience as shared by two or more that is intersubjective; that, as shared by many, is community; that, as transmitted down the ages, is historic; that, as intended for all Christians, is ecumenical and, as intended for all men, is universalist; it is the same experience, as headed for an ultimate goal, that is eschatological. So a single human reality, in its many aspects, and through its many realizations, at once is alive and intersubjective, communal and historic, ecumenical and universalist and eschatological.

Still, this gives rise to a grave question. Few would dispute that a pastoral council should spring from roots that were alive, intersubjective, communal and historic, ecumenical, universalist, and eschatological. Fewer, perhaps, would deny that what is granted to a pastoral council also should be granted to a pastoral theology, whether

pastoral theology was understood as guiding the operations of a vicar in his parish or the whole church in the whole earth. But the real issue, surely, is both larger and more momentous. Might not what is true of a pastoral council also be true of a doctrinal council? Might not what is true of a pastoral theology also be true of a doctrinal theology? Might not one go further and claim that what is true of pastoral and doctrinal theology also is true of systematic theology, of fundamental theology, of historical theology?

Such questions, I believe, naturally arise from the occurrence of a pastoral council, from the enlarged notion of a pastoral theology that was disseminated by the Council, from the announcement of a new theology by Karl Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx in their preface to the first volume of the series, *Concilium*.

As I believe these questions arise, so I feel that they demand an affirmative answer. If the epithet ‘pastoral’ means no more than the logical application of universal norms to particular cases, there is no need for a pastoral council or even for a serious pastoral theology. But if the epithet ‘pastoral’ means something more, then that something has to be found in what escapes the universal, in the individual and the personal in the concrete community and the ongoing process of history. Finally, if the individual, personal, communitarian, historical is really significant, then its consideration cannot be confined to a pastoral theology. For the whole of theology is a reflection on religion; the individual, the personal, the communitarian, the historical are essential to the Christian religion; and so, it would seem, the individual, the personal, the communitarian, the historical are relevant not just to a part of theology but to the whole of it.

Thomas Aquinas, in the first question of his *Summa theologiae*, defended the view that theology was a science. Meeting the objection that science dealt with the universal but theology with particulars, he answered: ‘Particulars are treated in sacred doctrine, but not as though they were the principal topic; they are introduced as models of life in the moral sciences or as presentations of the authority of those through whom

divine revelation came to us …' The Thomist position was inevitable as long as theology was conceived as a science and science was deemed to deal with the universal. But commitment to the universal is not the norm of modern science, which would explain all phenomena; it is not the norm of modern scholarship, which would understand the thought of individuals and narrate the histories of peoples; it is not the norm of a modern philosophy which can take its stand on the inner experience of the individual and from that basis proceed to an understanding of human process, human community, human history. Today, theology not only can be concerned with the individual, the personal, the communitarian, the historical – it just cannot avoid embracing that concern and adopting that viewpoint.

5 The Shift to the Human Subject

Now the shift to the existential human subject includes much more than the transition from universal essences to the personal experience of individuals. It drops the Aristotelian primacy of metaphysics to draw its basic concepts from the data of consciousness. It replaces a faculty psychology by an intentionality analysis. It subsumes the value of truth under the more comprehensive value of the good, to sublate what was called speculative intellect under the free and responsible deliberations, evaluations, decisions of a subject that is existential before being practical. It acknowledges the ongoing character of human investigation, and so conceives logic as a tool within the larger domain ruled by method.

This shift to the subject had its antecedents in the writings of Augustine, Pascal, Kierkegaard, Newman. It developed its techniques in the interplay of modern thinkers, the meditations of Descartes, the critiques of Kant, the comprehensive systems of the absolute idealists, the subsequent scattering of philosophic, scientific, and scholarly opinion that agreed only in rejecting the ambitions of the idealists.

Roman Catholic thinkers were slow to join their contemporaries and become personalists or phenomenologists or pragmatists or existentialists. This tardiness is easily understood. There stood in their way papal patronage of the works of Thomas Aquinas, a patronage that emanated from the Roman curia to bishops throughout the world, and from bishops to the rectors that presided over seminaries.

Still, this patronage came with its own remedy. The more Aquinas was extolled, the greater the value and the importance of grasping exactly what he thought. There was begun a critical edition of his works. Medieval Institutes fostered and spread the application to his writings of the best contemporary techniques in hermeneutics and history. It was not long before students of Aquinas banished from the classroom the old-style interpretation that quoted and then argued. What alone could be valid, what alone was acceptable, was the prolonged and tedious study and comparison of texts that rarely arrived at results that were both significant and certain. Devotion to the thought of Aquinas had perhaps been intended to provide a Maginot Line that ensured doctrinal uniformity and immobility. But modern scholarship tended to change it into a vast forest, and only a lifelong expertise enabled one to say which trees had been chopped down, which still stood, and what new ones had recently sprung up.

For an even longer period the same process had been going forward in patristics, so that there grew up, even in Roman Catholic circles, a large body of theological opinion familiar with the procedures and techniques introduced by the German Historical School in the nineteenth century. This opinion was quite aware that the methods already applied in the fields of patristic and medieval studies inevitably were to be extended to the study of scripture. That extension, long vetoed by Roman curial opinion, finally was acknowledged, approved, and praised by Pius XII in his celebrated encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu*, issued on the feast of St Jerome, September 30, 1943.

Now one cannot but be happy over these developments. It was a good thing for Catholic researchers to become familiar with their sources, biblical, patristic, medieval,

and modern, by employing the best available procedures and techniques. It was no less a good thing for them to be freed from the limitations of Greek and medieval systems of thought. Still, these good and, indeed, excellent things also presented a supreme challenge. Where traditional theology had felt it could proceed deductively from scripture to the councils, modern scholarship revealed more than a sea change. Where traditional theology retained an ideal of necessary and self-evident truths, modern reflection scrutinized a field of contingent developments, developments that were contingent both in the proximate objects investigated and in the merely probable conclusions reached by investigators. In an extremely quiet fashion there had come about a profound change in the structure and the procedures of theology.

Conclusion

If I have acknowledged a profound change in the structure and the procedure of Catholic theology, I must add that the change envisaged has long been awaited, that it is carefully motivated, that it is substantially limited.

The change has been long awaited. It dates not from 1965, when the Second Vatican Council closed, but rather from 1845, when Newman completed his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine*.

The change is carefully motivated. It is not the too frequent blind and total rejection of medieval achievement. It is a recognition of precise shortcomings that have been brought to light by modern science, modern scholarship, modern philosophy. It is not any undiscriminating acceptance of the modern. It is an acceptance that, at least for me, was prepared by years of teaching theology and by two detailed studies of Aquinas, one on *Grace and Freedom*, the other on *Word and Idea*. It is an acceptance worked out step by step in two books, *Insight* and *Method in Theology*, with the composition of the first beginning in 1949 and the completion of the second occurring in 1972.

The change is limited. Its aim is filling out the old by the new, *vetera novis augere et perficere*. If it gives cognitional theory a priority over metaphysics, it does so not to downgrade metaphysics but to ground it critically. And it wants a critically grounded metaphysics because any statement with an objective reference contains implicitly a metaphysics and there occur occasions, even in theology, when it is well to make the implicit explicit.

It places orthopraxis above orthodoxy, but it has no doubt that 'doing the truth' involves 'saying the truth,' that 'saying the truth' heads into the broader context of 'writing the truth,' that symbolic and anthropomorphic speaking and writing have eventually to give an account of themselves with a literalness and coherence that meet the requirements of logic. So the unfolding of Christian teaching mounts a succession of terraces. To discern the many routes followed at each stage of the ascent, to understand each and to measure its validity, calls for work that resembles closely Aloys Grillmeier's *Christ in Christian Tradition* and differs vastly from Piet Schoonenberg's *The Christ*.

A many-terraced unfolding of Christian doctrine by itself gives rise at each stage to a new and narrower elite and thereby threatens an increasing alienation of ever greater numbers. So the very development of doctrine calls for a doctrinal pluralism, for as many manners of teaching (recording ends here; remainder of transcription is taken from CWL 17) the same basic message as there are distinct classes dividing each of the many cultures of mankind. It is this pluralism that must be had both to preach the gospel to all nations and to reconcile the fact of doctrinal and theological development with the pastoral concern of Pope John XXIII and his Second Vatican Council.