

championed that cause. . . .

I believe I see a new phenomenon developing in the United States, which again, it would be mutually helpful for both Rome and the United States bishops to understand. Through innumerable court decisions that have made moral relativism the norm, the inordinate power of television and movies that glorify sex and violence, and are inimical to family values and cynical of all authority, a public educational system that has been almost totally secularized, and various other factors, our American culture has been changing dramatically in recent years. In response, I see the Church more and more becoming a counterculture, a voice crying in the wilderness. One need but examine recent documents of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to discover this trend. In my judgment, it is a trend that must continue. The great preacher-teacher, Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, said it very clearly: "What the world needs is a voice that is right, not when the world is right, but a voice that is right when the world is wrong."

Finally, I am not unaware that those who assigned me to prepare this paper really didn't ask me to append my personal advice, but I must run the risk. First, I believe it could help both Rome and U.S. bishops if we would declare a moratorium on the use of the terms "liberal" and "conservative." These are political terms, unworthy of bishops as teachers. Paul VI reminded us that orthodoxy is the Church's main concern, and the pastoral office is her most important, divinely willed mission. Orthodoxy is neither liberal nor conservative, right wing or left wing. Orthodoxy is orthodoxy, and we're all committed to it, lock, stock and barrel, however differently we may express ourselves as individuals.

Second, I would suggest that while every bishop must teach with unambiguous clarity and courage—the courage of an Ignatius in the jaws of the lions—we must keep both our balance and our sense of humor. Nietzsche said, "The world no longer believes because believers no longer sing." St. Augustine gave us the song: "You are an Easter people, and your song is Alleluia!" Pope John XXIII warned us not to be prophets of doom. God is not finished with us yet. The resurrection is not yet complete, the Body of Christ not yet fully built up.

Third, there is an awful lot of good in our American culture, and we bishops have learned from America even while teaching it. . . . If thus far we bishops may seem to have accommodated too comfortably to the moral relativism that characterizes much of American life, give us time. We have lots of water in our country, and we'll baptize our culture yet. Some of us may not be outstanding theologians, but when the chips are down, as we say in America, we know who we are. We subscribe completely to Vatican II's *Verbum Dei*, that our preaching is ". . . the preaching of those who have received through episcopal succession the sure gift of truth."

Pope John Paul II: Our criterion must be truth

The following passage is excerpted from the closing address of Pope John Paul II to the Archbishops of the United States, at the end of their March 8-11 meeting at the Vatican.

At this point we return to the difficulty which has surfaced time and time again in our discussions, *the task of handing on the truths of the faith* in a cultural context which questions the integrity and often the very existence of truth. Much of what has been discussed reflects this fundamental challenge to the contemporary Church as she seeks to evangelize. You have pointed to the many ways in which the various agents of evangelization might be helped to proclaim the truths of Scripture and Tradition more effectively. I encourage you to give these suggestions serious consideration.

It is essential that the agents, and in the first place we the pastors, speak the true message, "the gospel of God which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son . . . through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations" (Romans 1:1-5). We are guardians of something given, and given to the Church universal; something which is not the result of reflection, however competent, on cultural and social questions of the day, and is not merely the best path among many, but the one and only path to salvation: "there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). The People of God and those near and far must *hear the name*. We are all—you and I—bound to make an examination of conscience about how we are fulfilling the task, "lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power" (1 Corinthians 1:17). The true measure of our success will consist in *greater holiness, more loving service of those in need, and the advancement of truth and justice in every sphere of the life of your people and your country*. As one of our brothers so rightly said: "Success cannot be the criterion or the condition of evangelization. The criterion and condition of evangelization must be fidelity to the mission."