



Strings to the bow

Thinking With The Church

By Frank Morriss

I am intrigued by an article in the *Christian Century* in which Father Gregory Baum, O.S.A., details what is the proper course when a Catholic theologian's speculations contradict what the Church teaches.

In such a case, says the Canadian professor, the theologian puts his views "in a tentative way. He will propose some of his thoughts as questions. At the same time he will argue his point and show how other theological solutions do not account for the Biblical evidence nor for the present experience of the Gospel. Since he believes that insight is granted, by the Spirit, to the Christian community, he will engage in common research and conversation with others until a certain agreement arises as to whether a position of the magisterium that seems binding at present is losing, for such and such reasons, its normative function for the future."

Nat. 4-17-66

This results, of course, in subjugating the Church as a teaching body to her intellectual environment, rather than subjugating that environment to the Church. In the long run it would discredit the Church as a divinely protected depository of immutable truth.

If what the Church has taught in the past no longer holds, the conclusion of the logical man is that it never held. Outside a theory in which man's nature changes, there cannot be one norm for salvation in one century, and another after that century passes. If this were true, then there would be no sure way to know what Christ meant or what He intended the Church to teach.

Thinking with the Church has become a sign of obstinate conservatism. Or else

it is dismissed as hopelessly and naively simplistic.

There is a good deal to say for the simple in matters of theology. God is the least complicated of Beings, and the more divine we are in thought and faith the less complicated they become.

Christ's teaching is filled with evidence that at the end He expects a simple type of acceptance — the kind children give; the Christian's faith must be childlike Christ taught.

He was the great deflater of speculation. The promise of the Church was given Peter when he passed a test on that score. Presented a revelation as to Christ's identity, Peter accepted it and proclaimed it most simply and completely — "Thou art Christ, the Son of the Living God."

It seems to me we are imitating Peter when we accept simply what the Church teaches — not because we are seeking comfort by blindly accepting an authority but because we comfort Christ by unquestioningly accepting His revelation.

Plunged into the world, the Church is the single institution that emerges fundamentally unchanged. She remains recognizable despite the eroding passage of time;

No modernization should or can so change her features that a man of any century, transported to the present time, could not say — "There is the Church Christ founded!"

No use of authority, no exercise of infallible rule, no insistence on difficult doctrine or morality can make her less lovely to those who see that this is what Christ willed.

Those who seek to impose belief upon the church or subject her to the fads of a contemporary civilization clearly do not see in her what took eternal shape on the first Pentecost.