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Beyond Pros and Cons

Roman Carter, O.P.

In 1961 when the present writer began to study theology a rather different atmosphere from that of more recent times prevailed in the Catholic Church. In those days, verging as they did on the time of the Second Vatican Council, ecumenism was a novelty and what was taken for a genuine and defensible apologetic spirit often smacked of polemic. The word "dialogue" was still more associated with the writings of Plato than with much else. What we have come to call "communications" both within the Church and with those outside of her precincts was a rather undeveloped art.

How things have changed! Dialogue has been elevated to a norm for all discussion and a break in communications is considered about the greatest disaster that can befall any interpersonal relationship. All this is theoretically true but can be ideologically startling. Unfortunately a great deal of hostility lurks in the background of even our best ordered discussions. A spirit of polemic can infect us still. We are all too prone to want to see things in black and white no matter how colorful they are in themselves. "Right" and "good" we all too often associate quite gratuitously with ourselves and things we agree with; "bad" and "wrong" with bogies which may not even exist.

It might be well to look, therefore, at "polemic" and contrast it with "dialogue" to see not only how we might improve our communications skills but to aid ourselves in serving real Truth and the

Goodness which coincides with God's Will. At the outset we can say that lapsing into sheer polemic is always wrong and attempting sincere dialogue is so right as to have and be its own reward. But we have to admit there are gray areas in between which, though far from ideal as permanent stances, provide degrees of light and shading no good picture could do without. My lasting gratitude to Père Congar for sparking off what follows will be the sort of thanks to pioneering genius I would hope all open minded readers would share.

Polemic of its very nature is woefully short sighted. It aims at immediate results and reduces itself to a purely defensive ploy. Its false pretense of transcendence and authenticity is its appeal to authority. The authority appealed to may be perfectly authentic (and even transcendent) in itself. But polemic has a nasty twist in its desire to assert authority as something authoritarian. This involves disregarding human beings. It makes no allowance for their feelings, their personal psychologies or the crises of their lives. Polemic forgets that disagreements arise out of these factors as their contexts if not their ultimate source. Polemic always tries to abstract from history. For history is an illusive dimension and knowledge of it on a more profound level might destroy the type of superficial, ad hoc argumentation in which polemic glories and glorifies itself.

One of the most salient tactics of the polemicist is "atomization," proceeding point by point for the sake of a final "score." Polemic looks for "difficulties," not so that a true problematic concern may be established, but in order to triumph itself. If every argument can be disintegrated by an appeal to particular "wrongs" as typical of the foe, no global sense can or need be ever invoked. Reality, turned into a game involving the play of isolated facets, thus seems to vanish into thin air. The judgments of polemic pretend to be once and for all, final and irreversible. The idea that something or someone could be reassessed, extended or developed never enters the polemicist's closed mind. For polemic is hard. It is restrictive. It stiffens under attack. Having become inflexible polemic resorts to and generates increasing degrees of negativity. Not content to state the truth (to which it plays cursory lip-service) it merely sets out to refute opponents. Sometimes it goes so far as to refute imaginary foes who never were. Polemic fosters a cateche-

sis to be learned by rote against the learner's supposed or presumed enemies.

The greatest glory of real dialogue, on the other hand, is its global sense. Dialogue is always after the "big picture" and wants to see persons and things in wholeness with all their discernible implications. Dialogue is committed to principles of good will and takes sincerity as given. A Catholic sees everyone as potentially Catholic, as loving the highest truth, however unconsciously, and wanting the greatest and most universal good even if articulation regarding truth and good may be faulty. No worthy dialogue is unwilling to take the offensive against stultified opinions on his own side. In dialogue we cannot take for granted that what was said in the past by our own was always definitive. We have to evaluate non-essentials anew. We have to submit ourselves and our position to whatever further, updated evaluation is needed.

Dialogue values history. It gives history real importance. It wants to know what really happened, who was involved and how. For this it always is prepared to delve into primary sources, whether personal or documentary. And it realizes that spiritual truths come out of spiritual "worlds," that these areas are not "syndromes" of absurdity but lands of genuine response to God's own call. Such realms of the spirit, whoever they belong to and from whatever area of space or period of time they come, require the dialoguee's utmost concern for all that is positive within them.

If we can come to reject polemic and attain even to an initial dialogue with others, however different they may be from ourselves, we can find ourselves involved in a wholesome and spiritually satiating quest. We can submit ourselves with greater ease to the "flow of the Spirit" within us, and we can recognize it in others. Best of all, we can come to discern in the life of the Church that Christ wills to be and manifests himself through a communion (secret and inchoate as it may be) of all that is in him. If we rid ourselves of the trash of polemic and build upon the foundation of dialogue "pros and cons" will fade into insignificance and Unity as gift from God making us Godlike can become ours at last.

Redemptoris Missio

John Paul II

*Encyclical Letter on the
Permanent Validity of the Church's
Missionary Mandate*

Venerable Brothers,
Beloved Sons and Daughters,
Health and the Apostolic Blessing!

Introduction

1. The mission of Christ the Redeemer, which is entrusted to the Church, is still very far from completion. As the second Millennium after Christ's coming draws to an end, an overall view of the human race shows that this mission is still only beginning and that we must commit ourselves wholeheartedly to its service. It is the Spirit who impels us to proclaim the great works of God: "For if I preach the Gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (1 Co 9:16).

In the name of the whole Church, I sense an urgent duty to repeat this cry of Saint Paul. From the beginning of my Pontificate I have chosen to travel to the ends of the earth in order to show this missionary concern. My direct contact with peoples who do not know Christ has convinced me even more of the urgency of *missionary activity*, a subject to which I am devoting the present Encyclical.

The Second Vatican Council sought to renew the Church's life and activity in the light of the needs of the contemporary world. The Council emphasized the Church's "missionary nature," basing it in a dynamic way on the Trinitarian mission itself. The missionary thrust therefore belongs to the very nature of the Christian life, and is also the inspiration behind ecumenism: "that they may all be one... so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (*Jn* 17:21).

2. The Council has already borne much fruit in the realm of missionary activity. There has been an increase of local Churches with their own Bishops, clergy and workers in the apostolate. The presence of Christian communities is more evident in the life of nations, and communion between the Churches has led to a lively exchange of spiritual benefits and gifts. The commitment of the laity to the work of evangelization is changing ecclesial life, while particular Churches are more willing to meet with the members of other Christian Churches and other religions, and to enter into dialogue and cooperation with them. Above all, there is a new awareness that *missionary activity is a matter for all Christians*, for all dioceses and parishes, Church institutions and associations.

Nevertheless, in this "new springtime" of Christianity there is an undeniable negative tendency, and the present Document is meant to help overcome it. Missionary activity specifically directed "to the nations" (*ad gentes*) appears to be waning, and this tendency is certainly not in line with the directives of the Council and of subsequent statements of the Magisterium. Difficulties both internal and external have weakened the Church's missionary thrust towards non-Christians, a fact which must arouse concern among all who believe in Christ. For in the Church's history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis of faith.¹

Twenty-five years after the conclusion of the Council and the publication of the Decree on Missionary Activity *Ad Gentes*, fifteen years after the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* issued by

¹Cf. Paul VI, "Message for World Mission Day 1972," *Insegnamenti X*, (1972), 522: "How many internal tensions, which weaken and divide certain local Churches and institutions, would disappear before the firm conviction that the salvation of local communities is procured through cooperation in work for the spread of the Gospel to the farthest bounds of the earth!"

Pope Paul VI, and in continuity with the magisterial teaching of my predecessors,² I wish to invite the Church to renew her missionary commitment. The present Document has as its goal an interior renewal of faith and Christian life. For missionary activity renews the Church, revitalizes faith and Christian identity, and offers fresh enthusiasm and new incentive. Faith is strengthened when it is given to others! It is in commitment to the Church's universal mission that the new evangelization of Christian peoples will find inspiration and support.

But what moves me even more strongly to proclaim the urgency of missionary evangelization is the fact that is the primary service which the Church can render to every individual and to all humanity in the modern world, a world which has experienced marvelous achievements but which seems to have lost its sense of ultimate realities and of existence itself. "Christ the Redeemer," I wrote in my first Encyclical, "fully reveals man to himself... The man who wishes to understand himself thoroughly... must ... draw near to Christ... [The] Redemption that took place through the Cross has definitively restored to man his dignity and given back meaning to his life in the world."³

I also have other reasons and aims: to respond to the many requests for a document of this kind; to clear up doubts and ambiguities regarding missionary activity *ad gentes*, and to confirm in their commitment those exemplary brothers and sisters dedicated to missionary activity and all those who assist them; to foster missionary vocations; to encourage theologians to explore and expound systematically the various aspects of missionary activity; to give a fresh impulse to missionary activity by fostering the commitment of the particular Churches – especially those of recent origin – to send forth and receive missionaries; and to assure non-Christians and particularly the authorities of countries to which missionary activity

²Cf. Benedict XV, Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud* (30 November 1919): AAS 11 (1919), 440-455; Pius XI, Encyclical Letter *Rerum Ecclesiae* (28 February 1926): AAS 18 (1926), 65-83; Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Evangelii Praecones* (2 June 1951): AAS 43 (1951), 497-528; Encyclical Letter *Fidei Donum* (21 April 1957): AAS 49 (1957), 225-248; John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Princeps Pastorum* (28 November 1959): AAS 51 (1959), 833-864.

³Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis* (4 March 1979), 10: AAS 71 (1979), 274f.

is being directed that all of this has but one purpose: to serve man by revealing to him the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ.

3. *Peoples everywhere, open the doors to Christ!* His Gospel in no way detracts from man's freedom, from the respect that is owed to every culture and to whatever is good in each religion. By accepting Christ, you open yourselves to the definitive Word of God, to the One in whom God has made himself fully known and has shown us the path to himself.

The number of those who do not know Christ and do not belong to the Church is constantly on the increase. Indeed, since the end of the Council it has almost doubled. When we consider this immense portion of humanity which is loved by the Father and for whom he sent his Son, the urgency of the Church's mission is obvious.

On the other hand, our own times offer the Church new opportunities in this field: we have witnessed the collapse of oppressive ideologies and political systems; the opening of frontiers and the formation of a more united world due to an increase in communications, the affirmation among peoples of the Gospel values which Jesus made incarnate in his own life (peace, justice, brotherhood, concern for the needy); and a kind of soulless economic and technical development which only stimulates the search for the truth about God, about man and about the meaning of life itself.

God is opening before the Church the horizons of a humanity more fully prepared for the sowing of the Gospel. I sense that the moment has come to commit all of the Church's energies to a new evangelization and to the mission *ad gentes*. No believer in Christ, no institution of the Church can avoid this supreme duty: to proclaim Christ to all peoples.

Chapter I. Jesus Christ, the Only Savior

4. In my first Encyclical, in which I set forth the programme of my Pontificate, I said that "the Church's fundamental function in every age, and particularly in ours, is to direct man's gaze, to point the awareness and experience of the whole humanity towards the mystery of Christ."⁴

⁴*Ibid.*: loc. cit., 275.

The Church's universal mission is born of faith in Jesus Christ, as is stated in our Trinitarian profession of faith: "I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten Father... For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin Mary, and was made man."⁵ The Redemption event brings salvation to all, "for each one is included in the mystery of the Redemption and with each one Christ has united himself for ever through this mystery."⁶ It is only in faith that the Church's mission can be understood and only in faith that it find its basis.

Nevertheless, also as a result of the changes which have taken place in modern times and the spread of new theological ideas, some people wonder: *"Is missionary work among non-Christians still relevant? Has it not been replaced by inter-religious dialogue? Is not human development an adequate goal of the Church's mission? Does not respect for conscience and for freedom exclude all efforts at conversion? Is it not possible to attain salvation in any religion? Why then should there be missionary activity?"*

"No one comes to the Father, but by me" (Jn 14:6).

5. If we go back to the beginnings of the Church, we find a clear affirmation that Christ is the one Savior of all, the only one able to reveal God and lead to God. In reply to the Jewish religious authorities who question the Apostles about the healing of the lame man, Peter says: "By the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom God raised from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well... And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Ac 4:10, 12). This statement which was made to the Sanhedrin, has a universal value, since for all people – Jews and Gentiles alike – salvation can only come from Jesus Christ.

The universality of this salvation in Christ is asserted throughout the New Testament. Saint Paul acknowledges the Risen Christ as the Lord. He writes: "Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth – as indeed there are many 'gods' and many 'lords'"

⁵Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed: DS 150.

⁶Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 13: loc. cit., 283.

—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” (1 Co 8:5-6). One God and one Lord are asserted by way of contrast to the multitude of “gods” and “lords” commonly accepted. Paul reacts against the polytheism of the religious environment of this time and emphasizes what is characteristic of the Christian faith: belief in one God and in one Lord sent by God.

In the Gospel of Saint John, this salvific universality of Christ embraces all the aspects of his mission of grace, truth and revelation: the Word is “the true light that enlightens every man” (*Jn* 1:9). And again, “no one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known” (*Jn* 1:18; cf. *Mt* 11:27). God’s revelation becomes definitive and complete through his only-begotten Son: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom he also created the world” (*Heb* 1:1-2; cf. *Jn* 14:6). In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has made himself known in the fullest possible way. He has revealed to mankind *who he is*. This definitive self revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel, that is, the fullness of the truth which God has enabled us to know about himself.

Christ is the one mediator between God and mankind: “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth” (1 *Tm* 2:5-7; cf. *Heb* 4:14-16). No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit. Christ’s one, universal mediation, far from being an obstacle on the journey towards God, is the way established by God himself, a fact of which Christ is fully aware. Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.

6. To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith. Saint John clearly states that the Word, who "was in the beginning with God," is the very one who "became flesh" (*Jn* 1:2, 14). Jesus is the Incarnate Word – a single and indivisible person. One cannot separate Jesus from the Christ or speak of a "Jesus of history" who would differ from the "Christ of faith." The Church acknowledges and confesses Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*Mt* 16:16): Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth; he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all. In Christ "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (*Col* 2:9) and "from his fullness have we all received" (*Jn* 1:16). The "only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father" (*Jn* 1:18) is "the beloved Son, in whom we have redemption... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his Cross" (*Col* 1:13-14, 19-20). It is precisely this uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance, whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's center and goal:⁷ "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (*Rv* 22:13).

Thus, although it is legitimate and helpful to consider the various aspects of the mystery of Christ, we must never lose sight of its unity. In the process of discovering and appreciating the manifold gifts – especially the spiritual treasures – that God has bestowed on every people, we cannot separate those gifts from Jesus Christ, who is at the center of God's plan of salvation. Just as "by his incarnation the Son of God united himself in some sense with every human being," so too, "we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God."⁸ God's plan is "to unite all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (*Ep* 1:10).

Faith in Christ is directed to man's freedom.

7. The urgency of missionary activity derives from the radical newness of life brought by Christ and lived by his followers. This

⁷Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 2.

⁸*Ibid.*, 22.

new life is a gift from God, and people are asked to accept and develop it, if they wish to realize the fulness of their vocation in conformity to Christ. The whole New Testament is a hymn to the new life of those who believe in Christ and live in his Church. Salvation in Christ, as witnessed to and proclaimed by the Church, is God's self-communication: "It is love which not only creates the good, but also grants participation in the very life of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For he who loves desires to give himself."⁹

God offers mankind this newness of life. "Can one reject Christ and everything that he has brought about in the history of mankind? Of course one can. Man is free. He can say 'no' to God. He can say 'no' to Christ. But the fundamental question remains: Is it legitimate to do this? And what would make it legitimate?"¹⁰

8. In the modern world there is a tendency to reduce man to his horizontal dimension alone. But without an openness to the Absolute, what does man become? The answer to this question is found in the experience of every individual, but it is also written in the history of humanity with the blood shed in the name of ideologies or by political regimes which have sought to build a "new humanity" without God.¹¹

Moreover, the Second Vatican Council replies to those concerned with safeguarding freedom of conscience: "the human person has a right to religious freedom... all should have such immunity from coercion by individuals, or by groups, or by any human power, that no one should be forced to act against his conscience in religious matters, nor prevented from acting according to his conscience, whether in private or in public, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits."¹²

Proclaiming Christ and bearing witness to him, when done in a way that respects consciences, does not violate freedom. Faith

⁹Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia* (30 November 1980), 7: AAS 72 (1980), 1202.

¹⁰*Homily* for the celebration of the Eucharist in Krakow, 10 June 1979: AAS 71 (1979), 873.

¹¹Cf. John XXIII, Encyclical Letter *Mater et Magistra* (15 May 1961), IV: AAS 53 (1961), 451-453.

¹²Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.

demands a free adherence on the part of man, but at the same time faith must also be offered to him, because the "multitudes have the right to know the riches of the mystery of Christ – riches in which we believe the whole of humanity can find, in unsuspected fulness, everything that it is gropingly searching for concerning God, man and his destiny, life and death, and truth... This is why the Church keeps her missionary spirit alive, and even wishes to intensify it in the moment of history in which we are living."¹³ But it must also be stated, again with the Council, that "in accordance with their dignity as persons, equipped with reason and free will and endowed with personal responsibility, all are impelled by their own nature and are bound by a moral obligation to seek truth, above all religious truth. They are further bound to hold to the truth once it is known, and to regulate their whole lives by its demands."¹⁴

The Church as sign and instrument of salvation.

9. The first beneficiary of salvation is the Church. Christ won the Church for himself at the price of his own blood and made the Church his co-worker in the salvation of the world. Indeed, Christ dwells within the Church. She is his Bride. It is he who causes her to grow. He carries out his mission through her.

The Council makes frequent reference to the Church's role in the salvation of mankind. While acknowledging that God loves all people and grants them the possibility of being saved (cf. *1 Tm 2:4*),¹⁵ the Church believes that God has established Christ as the one mediator and that she herself has been established as the universal sacrament of salvation.¹⁶ "To this catholic unity of the people of God, therefore, ... all are called, and they belong to it or are ordered to it in various ways, whether they be Catholic faithful or others who believe in Christ or finally all people everywhere who by the grace of

¹³Paul V, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 53: AAS 68 (1976), 42.

¹⁴Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 2.

¹⁵Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 14-17; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 3.

¹⁶Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 48; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 43; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 7, 21.

God are called to salvation."¹⁷ It is necessary to keep these two truths together, namely, the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for salvation. Both these truths help us to understand the one *mystery of salvation*, so that we can come to know God's mercy and our own responsibility. Salvation, which always remains a gift of the Spirit, requires man's cooperation, both to save himself and to save others. This is God's will, and this is why he established the Church and made her a part of his plan of salvation. Referring to "this messianic people," the Council says: "It has been set up by Christ as a communion of life, love and truth; by him too it is taken up as the instrument of salvation for all, and sent on a mission to the whole world as the light of the world and the salt of the earth."¹⁸

Salvation in Christ is offered to all.

10. The universality of salvation means that it is granted not only to those who explicitly believe in Christ and have entered the Church. Since salvation is offered to all, it must be made concretely available to all. But it is clear that today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the Gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions. For such people salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his Sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit. It enables each person to attain salvation through his or her free cooperation.

For this reason the Council, after affirming the centrality of the Paschal Mystery, went on to declare that "this applies not only to Christians but to all people of good will in whose hearts grace is secretly at work. Since Christ died for everyone, and since the ultimate calling of each of us comes from God and is therefore a

¹⁷Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 13.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 9.

universal one, we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in this Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God."¹⁹

"We cannot but speak" (Ac 4:20).

11. What then should be said of the objections already mentioned regarding the mission *ad gentes*? While respecting the beliefs and sensitivities of all, we must first clearly affirm our faith in Christ, the one Savior of mankind, a faith we have received as a gift from on high, not as a result of any merit of our own. We say with Paul, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith" (*Rm* 1:16). Christian martyrs of all times – including our own – have given and continue to give their lives in order to bear witness to this faith, in the conviction that every human being needs Jesus Christ, who has conquered sin and death and reconciled mankind to God.

Confirming his words by miracles and by his Resurrection from the dead, Christ proclaimed himself to be the Son of God dwelling in intimate union with the Father, and was recognized as such by his disciples. The Church offers mankind the Gospel, that prophetic message which responds to the needs and aspirations of the human heart and always remains "Good News." The Church cannot fail to proclaim that Jesus came to reveal the face of God and to merit salvation for all mankind by his Cross and Resurrection.

To the question, "*why mission?*" we reply with the Church's faith and experience that true liberation consists in opening oneself to the love of Christ. In him, and only in him, are we set free from all alienation and doubt, from slavery to the power of sin and death. Christ is truly "our peace" (*Ep* 2:14); "the love of Christ impels us" (*2 Co* 5:14), giving meaning and joy to our life. *Mission is an issue of faith*, an accurate indicator of our faith in Christ and his love for us.

The temptation today is to reduce Christianity to merely human wisdom, a pseudo-science of well-being. In our heavily secularized world a "gradual secularization of salvation" has taken place, so that

¹⁹Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*,

people strive for the good of man, but man who is truncated, reduced to his merely horizontal dimension. We know, however, that Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one which embraces the whole person and all mankind, and opens up the wondrous prospect of divine filiation. *Why mission?* Because to us, as to Saint Paul, "this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ep 3:8). Newness of life in him is the "Good News" for men and women of every age: all are called to it and destined for it. Indeed, all people are searching for it, albeit at times in a confused way, and have a right to know the value of this gift to approach it freely. The Church, and every individual Christian within her, may not keep hidden or monopolize this newness and richness which has been received from God's bounty in order to be communicated to all mankind.

This is why the Church's mission derives not only from the Lord's mandate but also from the profound demands of God's life within us. Those who are incorporated in the Catholic Church ought to sense their privilege and for that very reason their greater obligation of *bearing witness to the faith and to the Christian life* as a service to their brothers and sisters and as a fitting response to God. They should be ever mindful that "they owe their distinguished status not to their own merits but to Christ's special grace; and if they fail to respond to this grace in thought, word and deed, not only will they not be saved, they will be judged more severely."²⁰

Chapter II. The Kingdom of God

12. "It is 'God, who is rich in mercy' whom Jesus Christ has revealed to us as Father: it is his very Son who, in himself, has manifested him and made him known to us."²¹ I wrote this at the beginning of my Encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, to show that Christ is the revelation and incarnation of the Father's mercy. Salvation consists in believing and accepting the mystery of the Father and of his love, made manifest and freely given in Jesus through the Spirit. In this way the Kingdom of God comes to be fulfilled: the Kingdom prepared for in the Old Testament, brought about by Christ and in

²⁰Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 14.

²¹Encyclical Letter *Dives in Misericordia*, 1: *loc. cit.*, 1177.

Christ, and proclaimed to all peoples by the Church, which works and prays for its perfect and definitive realization.

The Old Testament attests that God chose and formed a people for himself, in order to reveal and carry out his loving plan. But at the same time God is the Creator and Father of all people; he cares and provides for them, extending his blessing to all (cf. *Gn* 12:3); he has established a covenant with all of them (cf. *Gn* 9:1-17). Israel experiences a personal and saving God (cf. *Dt* 4:37; 7:6-8; *Is* 43:1-7) and becomes his witness and interpreter among the nations. In the course of her history, Israel comes to realize that her election has a universal meaning (cf. for example *Is* 2:2-5; 25:6-8; 60:1-6; *Jr* 3:17; 16:19).

Christ makes the Kingdom present.

13. Jesus of Nazareth brings God's plan to fulfilment. After receiving the Holy Spirit at his Baptism, Jesus makes clear his messianic calling: he goes about Galilee "preaching the Gospel of God and saying: 'The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel'" (*Mk* 1:14-15; cf. *Mt* 4:17; *Lk* 4:43). The proclamation and establishment of God's Kingdom are the purpose of his mission: "I was sent for this purpose" (*Lk* 4:43). But that is not all. Jesus himself is the "Good News," as he declares at the very beginning of his mission in the synagogue at Nazareth, when he applies to himself the words of Isaiah about the Anointed One sent by the Spirit of the Lord (cf. *Lk* 4:14-21). Since the "Good News" is Christ, there is an identity between the message and messenger, between saying, doing and being. His power, the secret of the effectiveness of his actions, lies in his total identification with the message he announces: he proclaims the "Good News" not just by what he says or does, but by what he is.

The ministry of Jesus is described in the context of his journeys within his homeland. Before Easter, the scope of his mission was focused on Israel. Nevertheless, Jesus offers a new element of extreme importance. The eschatological reality is not relegated to a remote "end of the world," but is already close and at work in our midst. The Kingdom of God is at hand (cf. *Mk* 1:15); its coming is to be prayed for (cf. *Mt* 6:10); faith can glimpse it already at work in signs such as miracles (cf. *Mt* 11:4-5) and exorcisms (cf. *Mt* 12:25-28), in the

choosing of the Twelve (cf. *Mk* 3:13-19), and in the proclamation of the Good News to the poor (cf. *Lk* 4:18). Jesus' encounters with Gentiles make it clear that entry into the Kingdom comes through faith and conversion (cf. *Mk* 1:15), and not merely by reason of ethnic background.

The Kingdom which Jesus inaugurates is the Kingdom of God. Jesus himself reveals who this God is, the One whom he addresses by the intimate term "Abba," Father (cf. *Mk* 14:36). God, as revealed above all in the parables (cf. *Lk* 15:3-32; *Mt* 20:1-16), is sensitive to the needs and sufferings of every human being: he is a Father filled with love and compassion, who grants forgiveness and freely bestows the favors asked of him.

Saint John tells us that "God is love" (*1 Jn* 4:8, 16). Every person therefore is invited to "repent" and to "believe" in God's merciful love. The Kingdom will grow insofar as every person learns to turn to God in the intimacy of prayer as to a Father (cf. *Lk* 11:2; *Mt* 23:9) and strives to do his will (cf. *Mt* 7:21).

*Characteristics of the Kingdom
and its demands.*

14. Jesus gradually reveals the characteristics and demands of the Kingdom through his words, his actions and his own person.

The Kingdom of God is meant for all mankind, and all people are called to become members of it. To emphasize this fact, Jesus drew especially near to those on the margins of society, and showed them special favor in announcing the Good News. At the beginning of his ministry he proclaimed that he was "anointed... to preach good news to the poor" (*Lk* 4:18). To all who are victims of rejection and contempt Jesus declares: "Blessed are you poor" (*Lk* 6:20). What is more, he enables such individuals to experience liberation even now, by being close to them, going to eat in their homes (cf. *Lk* 5:30; 15:2), treating them as equals and friends (cf. *Lk* 7:34), and making them feel loved by God, thus revealing his tender care for the needy and for sinners (cf. *Lk* 15:1-32).

The liberation and salvation brought by the Kingdom of God come to the human person both in his physical and spiritual dimensions. Two gestures are characteristic of Jesus' mission: healing and

forgiving. Jesus' many healings clearly show his great compassion in the face of human distress, but they also signify that in the Kingdom there will no longer be sickness or suffering, and that his mission, from the very beginning, is meant to free people from these evils. In Jesus' eyes, healings are also a sign of spiritual salvation, namely liberation from sin. By performing acts of healing, he invites people to faith, conversion and the desire for forgiveness (cf. *Lk* 5:24). Once there is faith, healing is an encouragement to go further; it leads to salvation (cf. *Lk* 18:42-43). The acts of liberation from demonic possession – that supreme evil and symbol of sin and rebellion against God – are signs that indeed “the Kingdom of God has come upon you” (*Mt* 12:28).

15. The Kingdom aims at transforming human relationships; it grows gradually as people slowly learn to love, forgive and serve one another. Jesus sums up the whole Law, focusing it on the commandment of love (cf. *Mt* 22:34-40; *Lk* 10:25-28). Before leaving his disciples, he gives them a “new commandment”: “Love one another; even as I have loved you” (*Jn* 13:34; cf. 15:12). Jesus' love for the world finds its highest expression in the gift of his life for mankind (cf. *Jn* 15:13), which manifests the love which the Father has for the world (cf. *Jn* 3:16). The Kingdom's nature, therefore, is one of communion among all human beings – with one another and with God.

The Kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society, and the world. Working for the Kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and transforms it. Building the Kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the Kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness.

*In the Risen Christ God's Kingdom
fulfilled and proclaimed.*

16. By raising Jesus from the dead, God has conquered death, and in Jesus he has definitively inaugurated his Kingdom. During his earthly life, Jesus was the Prophet of the Kingdom; after his Passion, Resurrection and Ascension into heaven he shares in God's power and in his dominion over the world (cf. *Mt* 28:18; *Ac* 2:36; *Ep*

1:18-21). The Resurrection gives a universal scope to Christ's message, his actions and whole mission. The disciples recognize that the Kingdom is already present in the person of Jesus and is slowly being established within man and the world through a mysterious connection with him.

Indeed, after the Resurrection, the disciples preach the Kingdom by proclaiming Jesus Crucified and Risen from the dead. In Samaria, Philip "preached good news about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (Ac 8:12). In Rome, we find Paul "preaching the Kingdom of God and teaching about Lord Jesus Christ" (Ac 28:31). The first Christians also proclaim "the Kingdom of Christ and of God" (Ep 5:5; cf. Rv 11:15; 12:10), or "the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pt 1:11). The preaching of the early Church was centered on the proclamation of Jesus Christ, with whom the Kingdom is now identified. Now, as then, there is a need to unite the *proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (the content of Jesus' own "kerygma") and the proclamation of the *Christ-event* (the "kerygma" of the Apostles). The two proclamations are complementary; each throws light on the other.

The Kingdom in Relation to Christ and the Church

17. Nowadays the Kingdom is much spoken of, but not always in a way consonant with the thinking of the Church. In fact, there are ideas about salvation and mission which can be called "anthropocentric" in the reductive sense of the word, inasmuch as they are focused on man's earthly needs. In this view, the Kingdom tends to become something completely human and secularized; what counts are programmes and struggles for a liberation which is socio-economic, political and even cultural, but within a horizon that is closed to the transcendent. Without denying that on this level too there are values to be promoted, such a notion nevertheless remains within the confines of a kingdom of man, deprived of its authentic and profound dimensions. Such a view easily translates into one more ideology of purely earthly progress. The Kingdom of God, however, "is not of this world... is not from the world" (Jn 18:36).

There are also conceptions which deliberately emphasize the Kingdom and which describe themselves as "Kingdom-centered."

They stress the image of a Church which is not concerned about herself, but which is totally concerned with bearing witness to and serving the Kingdom. It is a "Church for others" just as Christ is the "man for others." The Church's task is described as though it had to proceed in two directions: on the one hand promoting such "values of the Kingdom" as peace, justice, freedom, brotherhood, etc., while on the other hand fostering dialogue between peoples, cultures and religions, so that through a mutual enrichment they might help the world to be renewed and to journey ever closer towards the Kingdom.

Together with positive aspects, these conceptions often reveal negative aspects as well. First, they are silent about Christ: the Kingdom of which they speak is "theocentrically" based, since, according to them, Christ cannot be understood by those who lack Christian faith, whereas different peoples, cultures and religions are capable of finding common ground in the one divine reality, by whatever name it is called. For the same reason they put great stress on the mystery of creation, which is reflected in the diversity of cultures and beliefs, but they keep silent about the mystery of redemption. Furthermore, the Kingdom, as they understand it, ends up either leaving very little room for the Church or undervaluing the Church in reaction to a presumed "ecclesiocentrism" of the past, and because they consider the Church herself only a sign, for that matter a sign not without ambiguity.

18. This is not the Kingdom of God as we know it from Revelation. The Kingdom cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church.

As has already been said, Christ not only proclaimed the Kingdom, but in him the Kingdom itself became present and was fulfilled. This happened not only through his words and his deeds. "Above all, ... the Kingdom is made manifest in the very person of Christ, Son of God and Son of man, who came to 'serve and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mk 10:45)."²² The Kingdom of God is not a concept, a doctrine, or a programme subject to free interpretation, but is before all else *a person* with the face and name of Jesus of

²²Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 5.

²³Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

Nazareth, the image of the invisible God.²³ If the Kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the Kingdom of God which he revealed. The result is a distortion of the meaning of the Kingdom, which runs the risk of being transformed into a purely human or ideological goal, and a distortion of the identity of Christ, who no longer appears as the Lord to whom everything must one day be subjected (cf. 1 Co 15:27).

Likewise, one may not separate the Kingdom from the Church. it is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered towards the Kingdom of God of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the Kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both. Christ endowed the Church, his Body, with the fulness of the benefits and means of salvation. The Holy Spirit dwells in her, enlivens her with his gifts and charisms, sanctifies, guides and constantly renews her.²⁴ The result is a unique and special relationship which, while not excluding the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries, confers upon her a specific and necessary role; hence the Church's special connection with the Kingdom of God and of Christ, which she has "the mission of announcing and inaugurating among all peoples."²⁵

19. It is within this overall perspective that the reality of the Kingdom is understood. Certainly, the Kingdom demands the promotion of human values, as well as those which can properly be called "evangelical," since they are intimately bound up with the Good News." But this sort of promotion, which is at the heart of the Church, must not be detached from or opposed to other fundamental tasks, such as proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, and establishing and building up communities which make present and active within mankind the living image of the Kingdom. One need not fear falling thereby into a form of "ecclesiocentrism." Pope Paul VI, who affirmed the existence of "a profound link between Christ, the Church and evangelization,"²⁶ also said that the Church "is not an end unto herself,

²⁴Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 4.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 16: *loc. cit.*, 15.

but rather is fervently concerned to be completely of Christ, in Christ and for Christ, as well as completely of men, among men and for men."²⁷

*The Church at the service
of the Kingdom.*

20. The Church is effectively and concretely at the service of the Kingdom. This is seen especially in her preaching, which is a call to conversion. Preaching constitutes the Church's first and fundamental way of serving the coming of the Kingdom in individuals and in human society. Eschatological salvation begins even now in newness of life in Christ: "To all who believed in him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (*Jn* 1:12).

The Church, then, serves the Kingdom by establishing Communities and founding new particular Churches, and by guiding them to mature faith and charity in openness towards others, in service to individuals and society, and in understanding and esteem for human institutions.

The Church serves the Kingdom by spreading throughout the world the "Gospel values" which are an expression of the Kingdom and which help people to accept God's plan. It is true that the inchoate reality of the Kingdom can also be found beyond the confines of the Church among peoples everywhere, to the extent that they live "Gospel values" and are open to the working of the Spirit who breathes when and where he wills (cf. *Jn* 3:8). But it must immediately be added that this temporal dimension of the Kingdom remains incomplete unless it is related to the Kingdom of Christ present in the Church and straining towards eschatological fulness.²⁸

The many dimensions of the Kingdom of God²⁹ do not weaken the foundations and purposes of missionary activity, but rather

²⁷Address at the opening of the Third Session of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, 14 September 1964: AAS 56 (1964), 810.

²⁸Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 34: *loc. cit.*, 28.

²⁹International Theological Commission, Select Themes of Ecclesiology on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of the Closing of the Second Vatican Council (7 October 1985), 10: "The Eschatological Character of the Church: Kingdom and Church."

strengthen and extend them. The Church is the sacrament of salvation for all mankind, and her activity is not limited only to those who accept her message. She is a dynamic force in mankind's journey towards the eschatological Kingdom, and is the sign and promoter of Gospel values.³⁰ The Church contributes to mankind's pilgrimage of conversion to God's plan through her witness and through such activities as dialogue, human promotion, commitment to justice and peace, education and the care of the sick, and aid to the poor and to children. In carrying on these activities, however, she never loses sight of the priority of the transcendent and spiritual realities which are premises of eschatological salvation.

Finally, the Church serves the Kingdom by her intercession, since the Kingdom by its very nature is God's gift and work, as we are reminded by the Gospel parables and by the prayer which Jesus taught us. We must ask for the Kingdom, welcome it and make it grow within us; but we must also work together so that it will be welcomed and will grow among all people, until the time when Christ "delivers the Kingdom to God the Father" and "God will be everything to every one" (cf. 1 Co 15:24, 28).

Chapter III. The Holy Spirit, the Principal Agent of Mission

21. "At the climax of Jesus' messianic mission, the Holy Spirit becomes present in the Paschal Mystery in all of his divine subjectivity: as the one who is now to continue the salvific work rooted in the sacrifice of the Cross. Of course Jesus entrusts this work to human beings: to the Apostles, to the Church. Nevertheless, in and through them the Holy Spirit remains the transcendent and principal agent for the accomplishment of this work in the human spirit and in the history of the world."³¹

The Holy Spirit is indeed the principal agent of the whole of the Church's mission. His action is preeminent in the mission *ad gentes*, as can clearly be seen in the early Church: in the conversion of

³⁰Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

³¹Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem* (18 May 1986), 42: AAS 78 (1986), 857.

Cornelius (cf. *Ac* 10), in the decisions made about emerging problems (cf. *Ac* 15) and in the choice of regions and peoples to be evangelized (cf. *Ac* 16:6 ff). The Spirit worked through the Apostles, but at the same time he was also at work in those who heard them: "Through his action the Good News takes shape in human minds and hearts and extends through history. In all of this it is the Holy Spirit who gives life."³²

Sent forth "to the end of the earth" (Ac 1:8).

22. All the Evangelists, when they describe the Risen Christ's meeting with his Apostles, conclude with the "missionary mandate": "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, ... and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt* 28:18-20; cf. *Mk* 16:15-18; *Lk* 24:46-49; *Jn* 20:21-23).

This is a *sending forth in the Spirit*, as is clearly apparent in the Gospel of John: Christ sends his own into the world, just as the Father has sent him, and to this end he gives them the Spirit. Luke for his part, closely links the witness the Apostles are to give to Christ with the working of the Spirit, who will enable them to fulfil the mandate they have received.

23. The different versions of the "missionary mandate" contain common elements as well as characteristics proper to each. Two elements, however, are found in all the versions. First, there is the universal dimension of the task entrusted to the Apostles, who are sent to "all nations" (*Mt* 28:19); "into all the world and... to the whole creation" (*Mk* 16:15); to "all nations" (*Lk* 24:47); "to the end of the earth" (*Ac* 1:8). Secondly, there is the assurance given to the Apostles by the Lord that they will not be alone in this task, but will receive the strength and the means necessary to carry out their mission. The reference here is to the presence and power of the Spirit and the help of Jesus himself: "And they went forth and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them" (*Mk* 16:20).

As for the different emphases found in each version, Mark presents mission as proclamation or kerygma: "Preach the Gospel" (*Mk* 16:15). His aim is to lead his readers to repeat Peter's profession

³²*Ibid.*, 64: *loc cit.*, 892.

of faith: "You are the Christ" (*Mk* 8:29), and to say with the Roman centurion who stood before the body of Jesus on the Cross: "Truly this man was the Son of God!" (*Mk* 15:39). In Matthew, the missionary emphasis is placed on the foundation of the Church and on her teaching (cf. *Mt* 28:19-20; 16:18). According to him, the mandate shows that the proclamation of the Gospel must be completed by a specific ecclesial and sacramental catechesis. In Luke, mission is presented as witness (cf. *Lk* 24:48; *Ac* 1:8), centered especially on the Resurrection (*Ac* 1:22). The missionary is invited to believe in the transforming power of the Gospel and to proclaim what Luke presents so well, that is, conversion to God's love and mercy, the experience of a complete liberation which goes to the root of all evil, namely sin.

John is the only Evangelist to speak explicitly of a "mandate," a word equivalent to "mission." He directly links the mission which Jesus entrusts to his disciples with the mission which he himself has received from the Father: "As the Father has sent me, even so I send you" (*Jn* 20:21). Addressing the Father, Jesus says: "As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world" (*Jn* 17:18). The entire missionary sense of John's Gospel is expressed in the "priestly prayer": "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent: (*Jn* 17:3). The ultimate purpose of mission is to enable people to share in the communion which exists between the Father and the Son. The disciples are to live in unity with one another, remaining in the Father and the Son, so that the world may know and believe (cf. *Jn* 17:21-23). This is a very important missionary text. It makes us understand that we are missionaries above all because of *what we are* as a Church whose innermost life is unity in love, even before we become missionaries *in word or deed*.

The four Gospels therefore bear witness to a certain pluralism within the fundamental unity of the same mission, a pluralism which reflects different experiences and situations within the first Christian communities. It is also the result of the driving force of the Spirit himself; it encourages us to pay heed to the variety of missionary charisms and to the diversity of circumstances and peoples. Nevertheless, all the Evangelists stress that the mission of the disciples is to cooperate in the mission of Christ: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt* 28:20). Mission, then, is based not on human abilities but on the power of the Risen Lord.

The Spirit directs the Church's Mission.

24. The mission of the Church, like that of Jesus, is God's work or, as Luke often puts it, the work of the Spirit. After the Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus, the Apostles have a powerful experience which completely transforms them: the experience of Pentecost. The coming of the Holy Spirit makes them *witnesses* and *prophets* (cf. Ac 1:8; 2:17-18). It fills them with a serene courage which impels them to pass on to others their experience of Jesus and the hope which motivates them. The Spirit gives them the ability to bear witness to Jesus with "boldness."³³

When the first evangelizers go down from Jerusalem, the Spirit becomes even more of a "guide," helping them to choose both those to whom they are to go and the places to which their missionary journey is to take them. The working of the Spirit is manifested particularly in the impetus given to the mission which, in accordance with Christ's words, spreads out from Jerusalem to all of Judea and Samaria, and to the farthest ends of the earth.

The Acts of the Apostles records six summaries of the "missionary discourses" which were addressed to the Jews during the Church's infancy (cf. Ac 2:22-39; 3:12-26; 4:9-12; 5:29-32; 10:34-43; 13:16-41). These model speeches, delivered by Peter and by Paul, proclaim Jesus and invite those listening to "be converted," that is, to accept Jesus in faith and to let themselves be transformed in him by the Spirit.

Paul and Barnabas are impelled by the Spirit to go to the Gentiles (cf. Ac 13:46-48), a development not without certain tensions and problems. How are these converted Gentiles to live their faith in Jesus? Are they bound by the traditions of Judaism and the law of circumcision? At the first Council, which gathers the members of the different Churches together with the Apostles in Jerusalem, a decision is taken which is acknowledged as coming from the Spirit: it is not necessary for a Gentile to submit to the Jewish Law in order to become a Christian (cf. Ac 15:5-11, 28). From now on the Church *opens her doors and becomes the house which all may enter*, and in

³³Greek word "parrhesia" also means enthusiasm or energy, cf. Ac 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 9:27-28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8, 26; 28:31.

which all can feel at home, while keeping their own culture and traditions, provided that these are not contrary to the Gospel.

25. The missionaries continued along this path, taking into account people's hopes and expectations, their anguish and sufferings, as well as their culture, in order to proclaim to them salvation in Christ. The speeches in Lystra and Athens (cf. Ac 14:15-17; 17:22-31) are acknowledged as models for the evangelization of the Gentiles. In these speeches Paul enters into "dialogue" with the cultural and religious values of different peoples. To the Lycaonians, who practiced a cosmic religion, he speaks of religious experiences related to the cosmos. With the Greeks he discusses philosophy and quotes their own poets (cf. Ac 17:18, 26-28). The God whom Paul wishes to reveal is already present in their lives; indeed, this God has created them and mysteriously guides nations and history. But if they are to recognize the true God, they must abandon the false gods which they themselves have made and open themselves to the One whom God has sent to remedy their ignorance and satisfy the longings of their hearts. These are speeches which offer an example of the inculturation of the Gospel.

Under the impulse of the Spirit, the Christian faith is decisively opened to the "nations." Witness to Christ spreads to the most important centers of the eastern Mediterranean and then to Rome and the far regions of the West. It is the Spirit who is the source of the drive to press on, not only geographically but also beyond the frontiers of race and religion, for a truly universal mission.

The Holy Spirit makes the whole Church missionary.

26. The Spirit leads the company of believers to "form a community," to be the Church. After Peter's first proclamation on the day of Pentecost and the conversions that followed, the first community takes shape (cf. Ac 2:42-47; 4:32-35).

One of the central purposes of mission is to bring people together in hearing the Gospel, in fraternal communion, in prayer and in the Eucharist. To live in "fraternal communion" (*koinonia*) means to be "of one heart and soul" (Ac 4:32), establishing fellowship from every point of view: human, spiritual and material. Indeed, a true Christian community is also committed to distributing earthly goods, so that no one is in want, and all can receive such goods "as they need"

(cf. Ac 2:45; 4:35). The first communities, made up of "glad and generous hearts" (Ac 2:46), were open and missionary: they enjoyed "favor with all the people" (Ac 2:47). Even before activity, mission means witness and a way of life that shines out to others.³⁴

27. The Acts of the Apostles indicates that the mission which was directed first to Israel and then to the Gentiles develops on many levels. First and foremost, there is the group of the Twelve which as a single body, led by Peter, proclaims the Good News. Then there is the community of believers, which in its way of life and its activity bears witness to the Lord and converts the Gentiles (cf. Ac 2:46-47). Then there are the special envoys sent out to proclaim the Gospel. Thus the Christian community at Antioch sends its members forth on mission; having fasted, prayed and celebrated the Eucharist, the community recognizes that the Spirit has chosen Paul and Barnabas to be "sent forth" (cf. Ac 13:1-4). In its origins, then, mission is seen as a community commitment, a responsibility of the local Church, which needs "missionaries" in order to push forward towards new frontiers. Side by side with those who had been sent forth, there were also others, who bore spontaneous witness to the newness which had transformed their lives, and who subsequently provided a link between the merging communities and the Apostolic Church.

Reading the Acts of Apostles helps us to realize that at the beginning of the Church the mission *ad gentes*, while it had missionaries dedicated "for life" by a special vocation, was in fact considered the normal outcome of Christian living, to which every believer was committed through the witness of personal conduct and through explicit proclamation whenever possible.

*The Spirit is present and active
in every time and place..*

28. The Spirit manifest himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, the presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time.³⁵ The Second Vatican Council recalls that the Spirit is at work in the heart of every person, through the "seeds of the Word," to be found in human initiatives –

³⁴Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41-42: *loc. cit.*, 31-33.

³⁵Cf. Encyclical letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53: *loc. cit.*, 874f.

including religious ones – and in man's efforts to attain truth, goodness and God himself.³⁶

The Spirit offers the human race “the light and strength to respond to its highest calling,” through the Spirit, “mankind attains in faith to the contemplation and savoring of the mystery of God’s design:” indeed, “we are obliged to hold that the Holy Spirit offers everyone the possibility of sharing in the Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God.”³⁷ The Church “is aware that humanity is being continually indifferent to the problems of religion” and that “people will always... want to know what meaning to give to their life, their activity and their death.”³⁸ The Spirit, therefore, is at the very source of man’s existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situation but by the very structure of his being.³⁹

The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the Spirit is at the origin of the noble ideals and undertaking which benefit humanity on its journey through history: “The Spirit of God, with marvellous foresight directs the course of the ages and renews the face of the earth.”⁴⁰ The Risen Christ “is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit, not only instilling a desire for the world to come but also thereby animating, purifying and reinforcing the noble aspirations which drive the human family to make its life one that is more human and to direct the whole earth to this end.”⁴¹ Again, it is the Spirit who sows the “seeds of the Word” present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ.⁴²

³⁶Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 3, 11, 15; Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 10-11, 22, 26, 38, 41, 92-93.

³⁷Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 10, 15, 22.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 41.

³⁹Cf. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 54: *loc. cit.* 875f.

⁴⁰Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 26.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, 38; cf. 93.

⁴²Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 17; Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 3, 15.

29. Thus the Spirit, who "blows where he wills (cf. *Jn* 3:8), who "was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified,"⁴³ and who "has filled the world, ... holds all things together (and) knows what is said" (*Ws* 1:7), leads us to broaden our vision in order to ponder his activity in every time and place.⁴⁴ I have repeatedly called this fact to mind, and it has guided me in my meetings with a wide variety of peoples. The Church's relationship with other religions is dictated by a twofold respect: "Respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man."⁴⁵ Excluding any mistaken interpretation, the inter-religious meeting held in Assisi was meant to confirm my conviction that "every authentic prayer is prompted by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in every human heart."⁴⁶

This is the same Spirit who was at work in the Incarnation and in the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus, and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ, nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the Gospel⁴⁷ and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit "so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things."⁴⁸

Moreover, the universal activity of the Spirit is not to be separated from his particular activity within the Body of Christ,

⁴³Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 4.

⁴⁴Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 53: *loc. cit.*, 874.

⁴⁵Address to Representatives of Non-Christian Religions, Madras, 5 February 1986: AAS 78 (1986), 767; cf. *Message to the Peoples of Asia*, Manila, 21 February 1981, 2-4: AAS 73 (1981), 392f; Address to Representatives of Other Religions, Tokyo, 24 February 1981, 3-4 *Insegnamenti* IV/1 (1981), 507f.

⁴⁶Address to Cardinals and the Roman Curia, 22 December 1986, 11: AAS 79 (1987), 1089.

⁴⁷Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* 16.

⁴⁸Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the World of Today *Gaudium et Spes*, 45; cf. Encyclical Letter *Dominum et Vivificantem*, 54: *loc. cit.*, 876.

which is the Church. Indeed, it is always the Spirit who is at work, both when he gives life to the Church and impels her to proclaim Christ, and when he implants and develops his gifts in all individuals and peoples, guiding the Church to discover these gifts, to foster them and receive them through dialogue. Every form of the Spirit's presence is to be welcomed with respect and gratitude, but the discernment of this presence is the responsibility of the Church, to which Christ gave his Spirit in order to guide her into all the truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13).

Missionary activity is only beginning.

30. Our own time, with humanity on the move and in continual search, demands a *resurgence of the Church's missionary activity*. The horizons and possibilities for mission are growing even wider, and we Christians are called to an apostolic courage based upon trust in the Spirit. *He is the principal agent of mission.*

The history of humanity has known many major turning points which have encouraged missionary outreach, and the Church, guided by the Spirit, has always responded to them with generosity and farsightedness. Results have not been lacking. Not long ago we celebrate the millennium of the evangelization of Rus' and the Slav peoples, and we are now preparing to celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the evangelization of the Americas. Similarly, there have been recent commemorations of the centenaries of the first missions in various countries of Asia, Africa and Oceania. Today the Church must face other challenges and push forward to new frontiers, both in the initial mission *ad gentes* and in the new evangelization of those peoples who have already heard Christ proclaimed. Today all Christians, the particular Churches and the universal Church, are called to have the same courage that inspired the missionaries of the past, and the same readiness to listen to the voice of the Spirit.

(To be continued next issue)

Message for the 25th World Day of Peace 1 January 1992

John Paul II

Believers United in Building Peace

1. As is now customary, on 1 January next the annual World Day of Peace will be celebrated. Twenty-five years will have passed since this celebration was begun, and it is entirely natural that on this anniversary I should recall with undimmed admiration and gratitude the beloved figure of my venerable predecessor Paul VI, whose keen pastoral and pedagogical insight led him to invite all “true friends of peace” to join together in order to reflect on this “primary good” of humanity.

But it is likewise natural, a quarter of a century later, to look back at this period as a whole, in order to determine if the cause of peace in the world has actually made progress or not, and if the tragic events of recent months – some of which are regrettably still going on – have marked a substantial setback, revealing how real is the danger that human reason can allow itself to be dominated by destructive self-interest or inveterate hatred. At the same time, the progressive rise of new democracies has given back hope to entire peoples, inspired confidence in more fruitful international dialogue and made possible a long-awaited era of peace.

Against this background of light and shadows, this yearly Message is not meant to offer either a progress report or a judgment, but only a new, fraternal invitation to consider present human events, in order to raise them to an *ethical and religious vision*, a vision which believers should be the first to live by. Precisely because of their faith, believers are called – as individuals and as a body – to

be messengers and artisans of peace. Like others and even more than others, they are called to seek with humility and perseverance appropriate responses to the yearnings for security and freedom, solidarity and sharing, which are common to everyone in this world, which as it were has become smaller. A commitment to peace of course concerns every person of good will, and this is the reason why various Messages have been addressed to all the members of human family. Yet, *this is a duty which is especially incumbent upon all who profess faith in God and even more so upon Christians*, who have as their guide and master the “Prince of Peace” (Is 9:5).

The Moral and Religious Nature of Peace

2. The longing for peace is deeply rooted in human nature and is found in the different religions. It expresses itself in the desire for order and tranquility, in an attitude of readiness to help others, in cooperation and sharing based on mutual respect. These values, which originate in the natural law and are propounded by the world's religions, require, if they are to develop, the support of everyone – politicians, leaders of international organizations, businessmen and workers, associations and private citizens. What we are speaking of is a precise duty incumbent on everyone, and more so if one is a believer: bearing witness to peace and working and praying for peace are a normal part of good religious behavior.

This also explains why in the sacred books of the different religions references to peace occupy a prominent place in the context of man's life and his relationship with God. For example, we Christians believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of the One who has “plans for welfare and not for evil” (Jr 29:11) is “our peace” (Ep 2:14); for our Jewish brothers and sisters, the word “shalom” is so important that it constitutes one of the glorious divine names. It can be said that a religious life, if it is lived authentically, cannot fail to bring forth fruits of peace and brotherhood, for it is in the nature of religion to foster an ever closer bond with the Godhead and to promote an increasingly fraternal relationship among people.

Rekindling the “Spirit of Assisi”

3. Convinced of this agreement about this value, five years ago I wrote to the leaders of the Christian Churches and the major

world religions in order to invite them to a *special meeting of prayer for peace*, which was held in Assisi. The memory of that significant event has led me to return to and suggest once more *the theme of the solidarity of believers* in the same cause.

At Assisi the spiritual leaders of the major religions from the different continents gathered together: the meeting was a concrete witness to the universal dimension of peace, and confirmed that peace is not only the result of skillful political and diplomatic negotiations or a compromise between economic interests, but depends in a fundamental way upon the One who knows human hearts and guides and directs the steps of all mankind. As people concerned for the future of humanity, we fasted together, meaning thereby to express our compassion and solidarity with the millions and millions who are victims of hunger throughout the world. As believers concerned with the events of human history, we went on pilgrimage together, meditating silently on our common origin and our common destiny, our limitations and our responsibilities, and on the prayers and expectations of all our many brothers and sisters who look to us for help in their needs.

What we did on that occasion by praying and demonstrating our firm commitment to peace on earth, we must continue to do now. We must foster the genuine "spirit of Assisi" not only out of a duty to be consistent and faithful, but also in order to offer a reason for hope to future generations. In the town of Saint Francis, the Poor Man of Assisi, we began *a common journey which must now continue*, obviously without excluding the search for other ways and new means for a solid peace, built on spiritual foundations.

The Power of Prayer

4. But before having recourse to human resources, I wish to reaffirm the need for intense, humble, confident and persevering prayer, if the world is finally to become a dwelling-place of peace. Prayer is *par excellence* the power needed to implore that peace and obtain it. It gives courage and support to all who love this good and desire to promote it in accordance with their own possibilities and in the various situations in which they live. Prayer not only opens us to a meeting with the Most High but also disposes us to a meeting with

our neighbor, helping us to establish with everyone, without discrimination, relationships of respect, understanding, esteem and love.

Religious sentiment and a prayerful spirit not only help us to grow inwardly; they also enlighten us about the true meaning of our presence in the world. It can also be said that the religious dimension encourages us to make an even more committed contribution to the building of a well-ordered society in which peace reigns.

Prayer is the bond which most effectively unites us: it is through prayer that believers meet one another at a level where inequalities, misunderstandings, bitterness and hostility are overcome, namely before God, the Lord and Father of all. Prayer, as the authentic expression of a right relationship with God and with others, is already a positive contribution to peace.

Ecumenical Dialogue and Inter-religious Relations

5. Prayer cannot remain isolated and needs to be accompanied by other concrete actions. Each religion has its own outlook regarding the actions to be accomplished and the paths to be followed in order to attain peace. The Catholic Church, while clearly affirming her own identity, her own doctrine and her saving mission for all humanity, "rejects nothing of those things which are true and holy" in other religions; "she regards with respect those ways of acting and living and those precepts and teachings which, though often at variance with what she holds and expounds, frequently reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens everyone" (*Nostra Aetate*, 2).

Without ignoring differences or playing them down, the Church is convinced that, in promoting peace, there are certain elements or aspects which can be profitably developed and put into practice with the followers of other faiths and confessions. Inter-religious contacts and, in a unique way, ecumenical dialogue lead to this. Thanks to these forms of encounter and exchange the various religions have been able to attain a clearer awareness of their considerable responsibilities with regard to the true good of humanity as a whole. Today they all seem to be more firmly determined not to allow themselves to be used by particularistic interests or for political aims, and they

are tending to assume a more conscious and decisive attitude in the shaping of social and cultural realities in the community of peoples. This enables them to be an active force in the process of development and thus to offer a sure hope to humanity. In a number of instances, it has become evident that their activity would have proved more effective had it been carried out jointly and in a coordinated manner. Such a way of working among believers can have a decisive effect in fostering peace among peoples and overcoming the still existing divisions between "zones" and "worlds."

The Path to be Traveled

6. There is still a long way to go to reach this goal of active cooperation in the cause of peace: there is the path of mutual knowledge, assisted today by the development of the means of social communication and facilitated by the beginning of a frank and wider dialogue; there is the path of generous forgiveness, fraternal reconciliation, and collaboration in areas which though limited or secondary are nonetheless directed to the same cause; finally, there is the path of daily coexistence, sharing efforts and sacrifices in order to reach the same goal. Perhaps it is on this path that individual believers, people who profess a religion, even more than their leaders, must face the hard work and at the same time have the satisfaction of building peace together.

Inter-religious contacts, together with ecumenical dialogue, now seem to be obligatory paths, in order to ensure that the many painful wounds inflicted over the course of centuries will not be repeated, and indeed that any such wounds still remaining will soon be healed. Believers must work for peace, above all by the personal example of their own right interior attitude, which shows outwardly inconsistent action and behavior. Serenity, balance, self-control, and acts of understanding, forgiveness and generosity have a peace-making influence on people's surroundings and on the religious and civil community.

It is for this reason that on the next World Day of Peace I invite all believers to make a serious *examination of conscience*, in order to be better disposed to listen to the voice of the "God of peace" (cf. 1 Co 14:33) and to devote themselves to this great undertaking with renewed trust. I am convinced that they – and, I hope, all people of

good will – will respond to this renewed appeal of mind, which I make with an insistence which matches the seriousness of the moment.

Building Peace in Justice Together

7. The prayer of believers and their joint action for peace must face the problems and legitimate aspirations of individuals and peoples.

Peace is a fundamental good which involves respecting and promoting essential human values: the right to life at every stage of its development; the right to be respected, regardless of race, sex or religious convictions; the right to the material goods necessary for life; the right to work and to a fair distribution of its fruits for a well-ordered and harmonious coexistence. As individuals, as believers and even more as Christians, we must feel the commitment to living these *values of justice*, which are crowned by the *supreme law of love*: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Mt 22:39).

Once more I wish to emphasize that rigorous respect for religious freedom and for the corresponding right to it, is the source and foundation of peaceful coexistence. I look forward to this time when it will be a commitment which is not merely affirmed but really put into practice both by political and religious leaders, and by believers themselves: it is on the basis of the recognition of this right that the transcendent dimension of the human person assumes importance.

It would be a mistake if religions or groups of their followers, in the interpretation and practice of their respective beliefs, were to fall into forms of fundamentalism and fanaticism, justifying struggles and conflicts with others by adducing religious motives. If there exists a struggle worthy of man, it is the struggle against his own disordered passions, against every kind of selfishness, against attempts to oppress others, against every type of hatred and violence: in short, against everything that is the exact opposite of peace and reconciliation.

Necessary Support from World Leaders

8. Finally, I call upon the Leaders of the Nations and of the international community always to show *the greatest respect for the*

religious conscience of every man and woman and for the special contribution of religion to the progress of civilization and to the development of peoples. They should not succumb to the temptation of exploiting religion as a means of power, particularly when it is a matter of opposing an adversary by military means.

Civil and political authorities ought to accord the various religions respect and juridical guarantees – at the national and international levels – ensuring that their contribution to peace is not rejected, or relegated to the private sphere, or ignored altogether.

Again I call upon public authorities to strive with vigilant responsibility to prevent war and conflict, to work for the triumph of justice and right, and at the same time to support development which benefits everyone, and primarily those oppressed by poverty, hunger and suffering. The progress already made in the reduction of arms is worthy of praise. The economic and financial resources hitherto devoted to the production and sale of so many instruments of death can be used from now on for man and not against him! I am certain that millions of men and women throughout the world, who have no way of making their voices heard, share my positive judgment.

Special Word for Christians

9. At this point I cannot fail to address a particular invitation to *all Christians*. Our common faith in Christ the Lord obliges us to bear a united witness to “the gospel of peace” (*Ep* 6:15). It falls to us, first of all, to be open to other believers so as to undertake together with them, courageously and perseveringly, the immense work of building that peace which the world desires but which in the end it does not know how to achieve. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you,” Christ has said to us (*Jn* 14:27). This divine promise fills us with the hope, indeed and the certainty of divine hope, that peace is possible, because nothing is impossible with God (cf. *Lk* 1:37). For true peace is always God’s gift, and for us Christians it is a precious gift of the Risen Lord (*Jn* 20:19, 26).

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Catholic Church, we must respond to the great challenges of the contemporary world by joining forces with all those who share with us certain basic values, beginning with religious and moral ones. And among these challenges still

to be faced is that of peace. To build peace together with other believers is already to live in the spirit of the Gospel Beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt 5:9).

From the Vatican, 8 December 1991.

Joannes Paulus PP.

Message for Lent 1992

John Paul II

"Called to Share the Table of Creation"

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Creation belongs to everyone. Yes, as Lent draws near, when our Lord Jesus Christ calls us in a particular way to conversion, I wish to address each one of you and invite you to think about this truth and to do good deeds which will show your sincerity of heart.

This same Lord, whose supreme proof of love we celebrate at Easter, was with the Father from the beginning, preparing the wonderful table of creation, to which he meant to invite all without exception (cf. *Jn* 1:3). The Church has understood this truth, made known since the dawn of Revelation, and she sees it as an objective to be proposed to people as a way of life (cf. *Ac* 2:44-45; 4:32-35). In more recent times she has repeatedly preached the universal destination of the goods of creation, both material and spiritual, as a central theme of her social teaching. Continuing this long-standing tradition, the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, published on the occasion of the centenary of my predecessor Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, is meant to encourage reflection on this universal destination of goods, which comes before all particular forms of private property and which should give them their true meaning.

However, it is sad to see how, in spite of the frequency with which these clearly expressed truths have been proclaimed, the earth

with all its goods – which we have compared to a great banquet to which all the men and women who have lived or will live have been invited – is unfortunately in many ways still in the hands of a few minorities. Wonderful are the goods of the earth, both those which come directly from the generous hands of the Creator and those which are the result of the activity of human beings, called to cooperate in the work of creation through their intelligence and labor. Moreover, all human beings need a share in those goods in order to reach their fullness. It is thus all the more painful to note how many millions of people are excluded from the table of creation.

For this reason I earnestly invite you to concentrate your attention on this year commemorating the Fifth Centenary of the Evangelization of the American Continent, which in no way should remain a mere historical anniversary. Our vision of the past must be complemented by a look around us and towards the future (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 3). We must try to discern the mysterious presence of God in history, where he engages us and calls us to give him definite responses. Five centuries of the Gospel's presence on that continent have still not produced a fair distribution of the goods of the earth. And this is all the more painful when we think of the poorest of the poor: the indigenous groups, and together with them many *campesinos*, offended in their dignity by being excluded from the exercise of even their most fundamental rights, which also are a part of the goods destined for all. The situation of these brothers and sisters of ours cries out for justice from the Lord. Consequently, a generous and bold reform of economic structures and agrarian policies needs to be fostered, so as to ensure well-being and the conditions required for the rightful exercise of their human rights by the indigenous groups and the great masses of the poor who have so often been unjustly treated.

For those people and for all the dispossessed of the world – for we are all children of God, brothers and sisters to each other, and the goods of creation are meant for us all – we must work hard and without delay so that they can occupy their proper place at the table of creation. In the season of Lent and also during campaigns of solidarity – Advent campaigns and Weeks for the poor – a clear awareness that it is the Creator's will to place the goods of creation at the service of everyone should inspire work for the genuine and complete development of the person and of all people.

In a spirit of prayer and commitment we must listen carefully to the words: "*Behold, I am at the door and knock*" (Rv 3:20). Yes, it is the Lord himself who knocks gently at the heart of each one of us, without forcing us, waiting patiently for us to open so that he can come in and sit down at table with us. But, again, we must never forget that – according to the central message of the Gospel – Jesus calls us through each of our brothers and sisters, and our personal response will serve us the criterion for being put at his right hand with the blessed or at his left with the accursed: "I was hungry... I was thirsty... I was a stranger... I was naked... sick... in prison (Mt 25:34ff.).

Praying fervently that the Lord will enlighten the efforts of all on behalf of the poorest and most needy, I bless you with all my heart, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

From the Vatican, 29 June 1991.

Joannes Paulus II

In the Service of Life

Pontifical Council for the Family

*A Summit Meeting of Experts on Human Life
Rome, April 20-22, 1991
Instrumentum Laboris*

Introduction

We have been called together by the Pontifical Council for the Family, founded on May 9th 1981 by the Holy Father John Paul II, who had wished to announce it himself on May 13th, the day of the attempt on his life. Among the principal tasks entrusted to it by the Apostolic Constitution *Pastor Bonus*, the Council "sustains and coordinates initiatives for the protection of human life from its conception" (cf. Article 141, 3).

Our meeting took place after the Extraordinary Consistory of Cardinals (April 4-6, 1991), convened by the Holy Father John Paul II, the strenuous defender of human dignity and life, above all of the weakest ones. The theme of the Consistory was: "Threats against life."

Our three days' intensive work concentrated on procured abortion, a terrifying phenomenon, a real massacre every year wiping out more than forty million human beings¹ taking into account only

¹The address of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger to the Consistory of Cardinals on "Threats to Life" (April 4-7, 1991) and also Francesco Introna e Paolo Moreni, "L'aborto nel mondo: legislazione statistiche e tipologia," in *Rivista Italiana di Medicina Legale*, n. 9, 1987, pp. 825-838.

legalized abortions. In fact, this phenomenon is much more widespread and difficult to quantify.

The purpose of our work is more vigorous support for the family, "the sanctuary of life" (*Centesimus Annus*, n. 39). Today the rights of infants, especially the unborn, and the rights of the family are at stake.

Faithful to the Magisterium of the Church, in our different fields of work as scientists, biologists, physicians, philosophers, moralists, jurists, politicians and theologians, convinced of the intimate connection between the truth of Revelation and science, we have reflected on the following aspects of the problem:

- I. scientific and technical
- II. doctrinal
- III. cultural
- IV. legislative
- V. political and institutional

In the midst of such a difficult and complex question, we have tried to present certain issues, in our opinion the most burning ones, which we wish to put forward in a fraternal way, in a spirit of sharing, as an instrument for work, dialogue and research, in the context of the pastoral care of the gift of life. Therefore we offer these considerations to those who are working, like ourselves, in a variety of fields, at the service of God, man and society. We wish to be faithful to the truth, which has been battered about so many times.

In a world overwhelmed by a kind of "culture of death," as John Paul II describes it in the encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, n. 39, the evil of abortion is like an avalanche sweeping away even those who are not fully aware of it. Nevertheless, today there are many people who with faith and courage give witness in serving the culture of life. The Pope calls us to this "*Paressia*"² in the New Evangelization (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 45), to proclaim the Gospel of life.

During our work, documents and studies were collected, which we presented or received according to our respective specializations,

²A Greek term which means an attitude of "candour and courage."

and which obviously we cannot present now in this short statement. Nevertheless, we intend to publish this material soon in a separate volume, dedicated to the same theme on which we reflected.³

Encouraged by the Lord of life, we present concerns, information and prospects, which we place in the hands of those who should strive to see that we may have life and life in abundance (cf. *Jn* 10:10). These are your hands, professors, physicians, researchers in laboratories, teachers in universities, men and women who work in the law, politicians and those responsible for public affairs and the movements for life.

As we plan to take this type of reflection further, we will be pleased to receive any valid contributions in order to study these important and urgent themes in greater depth.

Above all, we are inspired by being able to use our work and our consciences for the good of humanity, in passing on these reflections to those who share our Christian vision of man and to those who are deeply concerned about the defense of human life in this world.

I. The Scientific and Technical Aspect

At the level of medical science in recent years, two facts stand out in particular, both connected with the mentality and the practice of abortion.

The first fact is based on the increasingly closer connection which has developed between contraception and abortion. Today, devices (such as the IUD), chemical compounds are under experimentation and in use which are at the same time contraceptive and abortifacient, or which have been manufactured and put into research as abortifacients pure and simple.

³In this future publication, various articles will be included on modern techniques of abortion such as the use of RU 486, death for the unborn and full of dangers for the lives of women, likewise the subcutaneous implant and other products, presented as contraceptives but which have an abortive effect. As well as the moral evil involved, these methods also present both physical and psychological risks for the mother. All this must be emphasized because, with obscure and ambiguous language, the propaganda tends to minimize the gravity of this crime and its unhuman nature.

Until now, the connection between contraception and abortion has been mainly psychological and sociological, whereas today the connection has become biological and functional in nature. At times women and, in the case of some compounds, even doctors are unaware of this. The same lack of adequate knowledge can often be verified in the case of intrauterine devices. The support given to spreading abroad these substances and devices neither takes account of moral values nor of frequently damaging effects on the health of women.

As well as this disinformation, which is at times deliberate, another reality must be denounced today. Especially in the practice of artificial procreation, there is an attempt to justify the loss of embryos by arguing that spontaneous abortions also happen naturally. In this regard, it is necessary to state clearly, before the consciences of researchers, doctors and women, that these two phenomena have a different and opposite moral qualification (cf. Instruction of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and the Dignity of Procreation, *Donum Vitae*, 1987, Part II, premise).

The second fact is the denial, on the part of some sectors of the scientific and cultural world, of the full value of the human being from the first moment of fertilization. To further this end, subjective concepts and purely external data are introduced. Therefore, it is necessary to reaffirm the full anthropological value of the human individual from the moment of fertilization (cf. *Donum Vitae*, Part I, n. 1).

The first moments of the beginning of human life are fundamental in determining the development which follows. It is not possible to conceive of the physiognomy and the characterization of individual human persons without going back to the first events of their life from the point of fertilization. In fact, what we are today is really the continuation and the development of what we were from the moment of fertilization. We should remember that at the moment of the union of the male and female gametes, all the characteristics of the new human being, including gender are defined.

Today doctors should feel further committed to carry out an honest educative role among patients and the public concerning the damaging effects of contraceptives and abortifacients and how they

work. To hide the truth is indeed an abuse and a grave omission which prevents women from exercising responsibility. It is very important to emphasize how, over the years, there has been, just as there is now, a culpable silence about the physical and psychological risks of abortion, both surgical abortion or the recently introduced chemical method. This silence is in stark contrast with the obligation for informed consent which must accompany any medical procedure.

Scientists and researchers, moreover, should be encouraged to draw up new preventive and therapeutic strategies and to make use of all available knowledge to overcome the causes of sterility, with methods which are compatible with respect for life and the dignity of procreation, according to the guidelines of *Donum Vitae* (cf. Part II, n. 8 and Conclusion).

II. The Doctrinal Aspect

The Church has the duty, given by her Lord, to support and enlighten people of good will in defense of life, especially the weakest and most defenseless life (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 30; *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Article 4).

All human values find their fullness in the Good News, therefore, in a special way, Christians are aware of the duty to promote and witness to the inviolability of fundamental human rights, of which the first is the right to life (cf. *Humanae Vitae*, n. 14; *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 30; *Charter of the Rights of the Family*, Article 4).

Life must be protected by the upright conscience of individuals, by the care of doctors as the servants of life and health, and by the legal systems of States, which in their constitutions set out to guarantee the rights of the weakest.

The truth concerning the human person and his or her dignity is often obscured in our day. Different factors are at work: philosophical subjectivism, moral utilitarianism, and legal positivism, which in many countries attempt to justify laws which concede to the strongest the possibility of deciding about the life of the weakest.

This phenomenon would not have been possible without the cooperation, or at least the failure to act, of some scientists, jurists,

moralists and even theologians. In the name of pluralism, of the numerical majority and of respect for opinions, the dignity of the person is in fact trampled under foot.

However, we should also indicate a comforting reality. Today an awareness of the eminent value of the life of the human person – created in the image and likeness of God, redeemed by the Word made flesh and sanctified by the Holy Spirit – promotes among Christians many initiatives of service, giving and solidarity towards the weakest, those rejected, especially by the affluent society, as unworthy to live. The words of Christ can be applied to the unborn, the most needy and defenseless of human beings: “Inasmuch as you have done this to the least of my brethren you have done it to Me” (Mt 25:40).

III. The Cultural Aspect

In society today, a vision of life prevails permeated with secularism, in which the sense of God, and hence a sense of sin, is lacking. Therefore the meaning of life itself is no longer grasped. In such an environment, the so-called “anti-life” mentality has been able to develop, that is a mentality set against human life. The ultimate reason for this mentality is “the absence in people’s hearts of God, whose love alone is stronger than all the world’s fears and can conquer them” (*Familiaris Consortio*, n. 30).

The serious loss of hope which characterizes today’s widespread “culture of death,” should arouse deep disquiet in consciences, which however, seem dulled to the point of suffocating in each soul that inborn instinct to live and serve human life. It is evident that forces, structures and programmes exist – supported by centers of ideological, political and economic power – which feed a culture of death. But no one wants to be considered a member of this culture.

The commitment required to oppose this dramatic human condition must be expressed in a broad and organic strategy of education. To further this end, it is useful to promote a courageous effort to discern what elements will survive in consciences in favor of the human person, expressed in the form of deep concerns. This educative strategy could lead to an authentic civilization of love, where the human person will be respected in his psycho-physical and spiritual unity, in truth, through a renewed commitment to the New Evangelization and through working for a culture of life, to which we

are called by the Holy Father (cf. *Christifideles Laici*, n. 38; *Centesimus Annus*, n. 39).

Guided by the word of God and listening to the authentic aspirations of the heart, the Church, as defender of the human person and "expert in humanity," will know how to find ways to speak to reason and conscience. Each person is aware that the life of every human being is certainly a biological reality, but it is not reduced to that. It is of much greater value.

A deep yearning for a better "quality of life" is present in our society. Often this desire does not only concern peripheral aspects of health or well-being, but genuine states of physical or psychological difficulty. Now, if the parameters of the value of human life remain at the level of physical efficiency or consumerism criteria, one could easily draw conclusions concerning the uselessness of some human lives, or at least of those who have reached a completely irreversible situation. But the central criterion for the value of life is of the spiritual, moral and religious order, that is of the very dignity of the person.

In spite of the fact that the value of human life and its inviolability may be evident through right reason and conscience, unfortunately in our day it is the object of many attacks, above all at the beginning and at the end of life itself or in situations of weakness and suffering. We understand the difficulty in which people who suffer in these situations find themselves and the temptation which perhaps they undergo. But one cannot forget that life belongs to God alone and that the mystery of suffering confronts us with the mystery of the person, which in turn reflects the very mystery of God.

On the other hand, while the desire for motherhood or fatherhood in itself arouses a spontaneous solidarity, it should not open the door to research for the "child at any cost." With the practices of artificial procreation and genetic manipulation or alteration, with the "waste" and the destruction of embryos or experiments on them, the unborn child is reduced to a "product" of technology, and his or her life and personal dignity are harmed. Thus ever wider openings are made for man's domination over man and for his desire to become his own "creator" (cf. *Donum Vitae*, Part I, n. 5, Part II, premise).

One outstanding aspect of the "quality of life" concerns the instrumentalized and depersonalized way of understanding sexual-

ity and corporality. Some of the effects of an illusory sexual "freedom" are the break up of the family, adultery and divorce, the spread of abortion, contraception and sterilization. Pornography, its various forms, is another powerful factor spreading morally irresponsible behavior and also various forms of sexual perversion.

The contraceptive mentality causes the will to become detached from its tendency towards the good and therefore towards true love. Thus sexuality and corporality become trivialized; their links with transcendence and the mystery at the origin of human life are overlooked or rejected. In consequence, human values such as chastity, fidelity, fertility, the gift of self, come to be despised and are not rightly understood. The unborn child itself comes to be thought of in an instrumental way as only the "inconvenient and unwanted fruit of sexual activity." The unborn is not welcomed in his truth, dignity and value as a human person destined to love and be loved. All this opens the way to the tragedy of abortion.

It is certainly no accident that the forces which promote abortion are the same as those spreading contraception. In fact, the connection between the two phenomena, at first above all psychological and sociological, is always effected and made concrete through so-called contraceptives that also have an abortifacient effect.

This mentality also strikes at a woman's dignity, often entailing her being used as an instrument, conditioning her to live in situations which are not fully in accord with her will and which contradict her deep yearning for motherhood (cf. *Mulieris Dignitatem*, n. 18).

To overcome the culture of death a change of mentality is necessary and urgent. We need to rediscover the deep meaning and value of each human being and to teach respect for his or her right to life, from contraception until natural death – that is, to find once more the significance of each human person.

Furthermore, there is an urgent need to put forward a healthy conception of sexuality, of self-respect as a person (so as also to teach respect for others), of chastity before marriage and conjugal fidelity, as well as educating the conscience in the deeper value of fertility. Teaching the methods for the natural regulation of fertility should be included in this context.

Some of the fields in which such educative work is most urgently needed are: first of all the family, because of its primary task of education; the school in collaboration with the family; Christian communities, above all the parish and youth associations; areas of social work and health care; the mass media.

The irreplaceable contribution of women should be recognized and emphasized much more in education for life and in the formation of a culture of acceptance and love, whether in civil society or in the Church herself (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 23).

IV. The Legislative Aspect

The first task for the legislator is to strive to make the legal system protect human life from the moment of fertilization. The law negates itself, or become only a force imposed on those who are weaker by whoever has power, if it does not protect human dignity, of which the right to life is the first and most elementary expression.

It should be stated clearly that the unborn "must be respected and treated as a human person"⁴ and that his or her rights constitute

⁴We reproduce the central ideas in the instruction *Donum Vitae* (I, 1) quoted by Cardinal Ratzinger at the Consistory of Cardinals, April 4-6, 1991: "...modern genetics shows that 'from the time that the ovum is fertilized, a new life is begun which is neither that of the father nor the mother: it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth.' Science has shown 'that from the first instant, the programme is fixed as to what this living being will be: a man, this individual-man with his characteristic aspects already well determined. Right from fertilization is begun the adventure of a human life, and each of its great capacities require time to develop, and to be in a position to act.' The recent discoveries of human biology recognize that 'In the zygote resulting from fertilization the biological identity of the new human individual is already constituted.' Certainly no experimental datum can be in itself sufficient to bring us to the recognition of a spiritual soul; nevertheless, the conclusions of science regarding the human embryo provide a valuable indication for discerning by the use of reason a personal presence at the moment of the first appearance of a human life: how could a human individual not be a human person? Regarding this question, if the Magisterium has not expressed itself in a binding way by a philosophical affirmation, it has still taught constantly that from the first moment of its existence, as the product of human generation, the embryo must be guaranteed unconditional respect which is morally due to a human being in his spiritual and bodily totality. 'The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception...'"

Note: At the time our declaration was being sent to be published, the Holy Father visited Poland, where the defence of life had an important place in his catechesis. In this

the real reason for the obligation of protection which is incumbent on States. Because the purpose of all law is the promotion of human dignity ("*hominum causa omne jus constitutum est*"), the iniquity of pro-abortion laws is not only deprived from their consequences,⁵ but also from the destruction of the very concept of law. Therefore it is necessary to denounce vigorously and decisively the injustice of pro-abortion laws.

It should also be emphasized that in some juridical interpretations the concept of "person" has come to be used in a discriminatory way: some are recognized as persons, others however are not considered as such and so the way is opened for their legal elimination.

Nevertheless, the concept of "person" should serve to distinguish each human being from any other created entity. In other words, each man or woman is a person: the word indicates his or her transcendence with respect to the rest of creation.

In some forms of legislation the obligation on the part of the State to protect embryos is affirmed, but this is not enough. In fact such an obligation could even be justified only for reasons of collective interest (for example, to increase the population), whereas the reason for the obligation of protection is based on the value and rights of each human being. Moreover, any legislation consistent with these principles must put this protection into practice.

Therefore, the duty of legislators to serve life is essential and central. It is necessary not only to avoid the death of so many innocent ones, but also to prevent democracy from being turned into totalitarianism⁶ and liberty into egotistical license. The foundation

context, using these words, he said: "First the attitude to the newly conceived child must change. He is never an intruder or an aggressor, even if one assumes that he has arrived unexpectedly. *He is a human person, (Jest ludzka osoba)*, and therefore has the right to receive from his parents the unstinting *gift of themselves*, even if that would require particular sacrifice on their part" (Homily at the Mass for the faithful of Kielce, n. 7).

⁵One could enumerate problems such as the following: the increase in the number of abortions, the corruption of consciences, the degradation for the medical profession, the authoritarian punishment of conscientious objection...

⁶Cf. Michel Schooyans, *L'avortement: enjeux politiques*, Editions du Preambule, Quebec, 1990, pp. 157 ss.

of democracy is the affirmation of the equality of every man and woman, exclusively by virtue of his or her humanity, not on account of what he or she possesses or is capable of doing. When States take to themselves the right to distinguish between human lives which may have value and human lives which may not have value, we have started to travel along the totalitarian road. If it is licit to kill innocent ones in the name of freedom, in that case freedom has changed its meaning and become an expression of selfishness, not a means of solidarity and love.

Finally, the many pacifist movements, which exist also in a Catholic context, ought to be reminded that pro-abortion laws do not contribute to true peace. Therefore, these movements, especially the Catholic ones, should be called again to the duty to commit themselves also to defend life at its origins.

The question of laws which fully respect the right to life must be addressed to all legislators as such, whatever their religion or political position may be. It must be reaffirmed that the principles written into international declarations and the constitutions of modern States point out respect for human dignity and human rights as one of the essential duties of States. Does not denying the significance of the human being in the womb perhaps represent the betrayal of these principles and the acceptance of a criterion of discrimination concerning man?

Christian legislators in particular have a very serious duty with regard to life, whether in States which already have pro-abortion laws, or in those which do not have them. In the case of the latter, we speak of preventing any damage to the principle of respect for life and of promoting norms to remove the causes, which in practice could lead to abortion. But also in States where permissive laws have already been approved, Christian legislators must consider the changing of these laws as an essential and central duty in their mission. Legislators cannot be indifferent to their electors' discernment regarding their consistent attitude to these issues.

Certainly the real difficulties are well-known when it comes to obtaining majorities fully respectful of the right to life in parliaments. Nevertheless, this is no excuse for not decisively aiming at overturning pro-abortion laws, moving towards full respect for the right to life

from conception. To this end, believers in God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer must realize that their participation in the exercise of power is incompatible with a lack of commitment to the tenacious and daily effort to change laws and administrative practices.

V. The Political and Institutional Aspect

True democracy is founded on a conception of human dignity based on the fundamental right to life – from conception until natural death – a right for all and to be recognized by all. Therefore the promotion and defense of life is the pre-requisite for the struggle for the fundamental liberties which are the basis of democracy.

Today, after the recent fall of a totalitarian system (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, n. 22 ss), there is the threat of a new, subtle, totalitarianism, based on the false judgment according to which every opinion has equal validity; in consequence there is the danger that the strongest may prevail. A democratic State worthy of the name cannot renounce the protection of every human life.

During the last twenty-five years – after the approval of the abortion law by the English parliament (1967) – strong movements in support of abortion have developed. Today these movements have become a powerful politico-economic structure which demands or defend abortion as a legal possibility, as a woman's right and even as an obligation which the State could impose.

At the international level, abortion movements receive huge sums of money.⁷ The funds for promoting abortion as a method of birth-control are raised by some international institutions, govern-

⁷ At the international level, the pro-abortion movement is based above all on the activity of the International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) and on other organizations which operate within the perspective of neo-malthusian demographic control, achieved even through the promotion of abortion. This contradicts Recommendation 18 of the *Report of the International Conference on Population, 1984* (United Nations) which urges governments: "To take appropriate steps to help women avoid abortion, which in no case should be promoted as a method of family planning..." However, even organization in the United Nations' ambit are involved in research on the abortion pill RU 486. The promoters of abortion also work through various groups: medical and legal professional associations, social welfare bodies, political lobbies at the national and international level and often through centres of power and the mass media.

birth-control are raised by some international institutions, governments of economically developed countries and by private foundations and companies. Moreover, some of the profits of the contraceptive industry and the activities of clinics are often fed back into further promotion of abortion. However, some government policies are well-known which deny funding to programmes which support abortion in other countries.

Even in the field of education, some organizations exercise influence over children and young people, aimed at changing the mentality of new generations, destroying family values. In this way the anti-life mentality becomes ever stronger and more widespread (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 30). These organization also provide increasingly for the training of doctors in developing countries, so that they will be disposed to favor abortion in these nations.

In the struggle for the defense of life we must constantly analyze the economic and political components which make up the anti-life structures, so as to define the crucial points on which to concentrate our activity.

It is important also to be aware of family social policy, because in many countries public structures have operated not only in terms of favoring abortion, but also in creating obstacles to procreation. There are, for example, so called housing policies which impede the growth of the family. There is a lack of real social security, of distributive justice, furthermore there are taxation policies and work legislation which impose serious difficulties on the family. All this naturally contributes to a rejection of life.

Conclusion

These are some aspects of our reflections, which, as was stated at the beginning, we want to share with all who will receive this document.

It is a particular pleasure for us to present the results of our work at the time when we celebrate the ten years which have passed since the founding of the Pontifical Council for the Family, created by the Holy Father, and when we also are about to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*.

This document has been received by the Pontifical Council for the Family as a working instrument and is published to promote the pastoral care of the family as the "sanctuary of life."

A. Card. LOPEZ TRUJILLO

The Sign of Water

Miguel A. Bernad, S.J.

The French writer Guy de Maupassant has a remarkable story about a hunting trip in the marshland in a bitterly cold night before dawn. Sheltered in a glass-covered hut in the middle of the marsh, waiting for the birds to come flying overhead, they are aware of the marsh waters surrounding them. Despite the cold night the waters are warm and teeming with life. It seems to them that it was from this marshy water that all life began.

It is natural to think of water as the source or at least the matrix of life, for no life is possible without water. Without water neither plants nor animals nor human beings can live.

Moreover, there is something in water that suggests the idea of limitless possibilities. A Dictionary of Symbols puts it as follows: "The waters, as an indeterminate formless mass, represent the infinitude of possibilities virtually containing all that is as yet formless and can come into existence" (*Diccionario de los símbolos*, ed. Chevalier and Gheerbrant, Barcelona, Herder, 1986, p. 52).

Those who have studied the symbolic use of water in religion and literature (as the same Dictionary of Symbols tells us) have reduced the many symbolic meanings into three principal ones: water as a source of life; as an instrument for purification; as a center for regeneration.

Matrix of Life

To the Hebrew mind, as to that of several other peoples, water was the primordial element that existed long before other things came to exist. In some way these other things were derived from or engendered in water. Something of this idea is suggested in the opening lines of Genesis:

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.

Gn 1:1

The picture given here is that, long before the dry land appeared and long before any living creatures existed, the immense sea of waters were already there, wrapped in total darkness, but with the Breath of God sweeping over them. Then God spoke, and by his spoken Word there came to exist, first the light, then the dry land, then the living creatures of sea, land and sky.

That is of course not intended to be a scientific description of the origin of the universe. It is an imaginative representation, in accordance with the Hebrew way of thinking in those times, to emphasize an undeniable fact: that God is the Creator of all things and that nothing has come to exist which is not from him.

That magnificent picture of Creation is recalled to our imagination by the liturgical service of Holy Saturday in the blessing of the baptismal water:

Deus, cuius Spiritus super aquas inter ipsa mundi primordia ferebatur, ut jam tunc virtutem sanctificationis aquarum natura conciperet...

"O God, whose spirit was blowing over the waters at the dawn of Creation, so that even then nature might conceive the power of water to sanctify..." The liturgical prayer refers directly to the aptness of water as an instrument of sanctification, but the picture of the Spirit blowing over the waters "*in ipsa mundi primordia*" recalls the notion that water was the primordial element from which all things ultimately came.

The Second Letter of Peter expresses the same idea. On the culpable ignorance of unbelievers the writer says:

They deliberately ignore the fact that the heavens existed of old, and earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God; through these the word that then existed was destroyed, deluged by water.

2 Pt 3:5

God's Blessing

People who live in or near a desert are acutely aware of man's need for water. To them water is more precious than gold. The same is true of people who have to depend on the rain for their crops or for their herds. A drought spells disaster. And when they find a bubbling spring or a flowing stream, they count themselves especially fortunate. For them water becomes a symbol of all the good things that God can give. Abundance of water is a symbol of prosperity and the abundant life.

Lo, I shall spread prosperity over her like a river and the wealth of nations like an overflowing torrent.

Is 66:12

The good person is likened to "a tree planted beside the waters" (Ps 1:3; Jr 17:7-8). God's loving protection is like the shepherd's who leads the flock to the "still waters" where the sheep can drink their fill (Ps 23). God's bounty is shown in abundance of water he provides:

*He changed the desert into pools of water,
land into water springs.*

Ps 107:35

On the other hand, God's anger is compared to the drying up of the land:

*He changed rivers into desert,
water springs into thirsty ground,
fruitful land into salt marsh.*

Ps 107:33

To the Jews in exile, deliverance is promised and a prosperous life in their homeland:

*I will pour water upon the thirsty ground
and streams upon the land;
I will pour out my spirit upon your offspring
and my blessing upon your descendants.*

Is 43:3

To those who have sinned, pardon and reconciliation are offered like water to the thirsty:

*All who are thirsty
come to the water.*

Is 55:1

But reconciliation with God can be effected not by mere external celebrations but by real conversion expressed in good works ("justice" and "goodness") and these are likened to water:

*Away with your songs,
I will not listen to the melodies of your harps.
But if you would offer holocausts,
then let justice surge like water,
and goodness like an unfailing stream.*

Am 51:23-24

On the other hand, those who forsake the Lord and rebel against his commands are like people deprived of water:

*Two evils have my people done:
they have forsaken me, the source of living waters,
they have dug themselves cisterns,
broken cisterns that can hold no water.*

Jr 21:23

In such a context, it is natural to pray for God's blessings – whatever the blessings might be – under the symbol of water: like the dew and the rain that Isaiah uses to express his people's longing for someone to save them:

*Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above
and let the clouds rain the just;
let the earth be opened
and bud forth a savior.*

Is 45:8

The soul's longing for God is compared to the thirsty earth during a drought:

*for you my flesh pines and my soul thirsts
like the earth, parched and lifeless
and without water.*

Ps 63:2

Or like the thirsty animals of the forest looking for water to drink:

*As the hind longs for the running waters,
so my soul longs for you, my God.*

Ps 42:1

Shakespeare was only echoing an ancient Judeo-Christian concept when he made Portia liken mercy to the gentle rain:

*It droppeth like the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath.*

Destruction

Water is an ambivalent symbol. The water that nourishes can also destroy. The "indeterminate formless mass" of the waters that can engender so many things, can also submerge and absorb them once more into formlessness. The waters of the Deluge almost totally wiped out the human race. The waters of the Red Sea, that divided to allow the Israelites to pass through "dry shod," closed again to drown the pursuing army. The torrents that are powerless against a house built on rock can utterly destroy another built on sand:

*And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew
and they beat upon that house and it fell, and great was the
fall thereof.*

Mt 7:26-27

Because of water's destructive power, the sea became a symbol of evil. In biblical times man's conquest of the ocean was not yet complete. Voyages were long and dangerous. Ships were frail. Storms were frequent and unpredictable. Shipwreck was an ever present danger, as St. Paul knew from experience. People came to dread and even to hate the sea. Understandably, in their concept of heaven the sea had no place:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. The former heaven and the former earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.

The destructive power of the sea is reflected in T.S. Eliot's "Death by Water," a section of "The Waste Land," where the drowning puts an end to the merchant's hopes and ambitions, as any kind of death does for all mankind. In later poems however, Eliot has a more benign view of the sea as a symbol not only of destruction but also of regeneration. He recalls and gives new meaning to Shakespeare's song in *The Tempest* in which those that drown undergo "a sea change" into "something rich and strange." Shakespeare of course was referring merely to a natural transformation ("those are pearls that were his eyes"), but Eliot sees more than the natural. With Christian perception he sees the waters as symbolizing destruction and rebirth, death and resurrection. Which makes death-by-water a symbol of baptism, the sacramental participation in Christ's death and rising to new life.

Purification

Because water is normally used for washing, it is an apt symbol to signify interior purification:

*I will sprinkle clean water upon you
to cleanse you from all your impurities;
and from all your idols
I will cleanse you.
I will give you a new heart,
and place a new spirit within you...*

Ez 36:25-26

Jesus washed his apostles' feet with water. It was (as he himself hinted) a gesture of humility and fraternal love. But it was more than that. This was not a mere external cleansing of the feet to wash away the dust and mud. There was also an interior purification effected through the symbol of external washing. "You are all clean, but not all," he said (*Jn* 13:19). That must have meant internal purity: twelve apostles had been washed, yet only eleven were "clean." Judas, who also had his feet washed, did not receive interior cleansing.

A dramatic use of water as a symbol of internal purification was Pilate's gesture of washing his hands: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man" (*Mt* 27:24). It was a dramatic but also an empty gesture, for no amount of water could possibly wash away the guilt of condemning a man to death whom Pilate himself had officially and repeatedly declared innocent of any crime.

One of the striking ironies in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is precisely this failure of water to effect an internal cleansing. It is easy enough to wash the blood from the hands, as Lady Macbeth naively thinks: "a little water will clean us of this deed." But the blood, thus externally washed away, remains on the soul. Later, in her dreams, Lady Macbeth will see her hands still blood-stained. ("Yet here's a spot. Out, damned spot. Out, I say.") She can even smell the blood still: "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." Macbeth on the other hand, who, prodded by his wife, does the actual killing of the King, is more perceptive. He knows that no amount of water can wash away the guilt of this heinous murder:

*Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red.*

II, ii, 61f.

This is the stupendous thing about baptism: the external rite of washing does effect a total interior cleansing of the soul.

Living Water

To the commonly accepted symbolic meanings of water – as a symbol of life and well-being, a symbol of God's blessings, of destruc-

tion and regeneration, of cleansing--Jesus adds a new meaning, more profound than any of the others. He uses it as a symbol for that eternal life which he came to give: "I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly" (*Jn 10:10*).

For this he uses the symbol of "living water" used earlier by the prophets. "Living water" is the pure, fresh, never-failing water that bubbles continually from a spring, and therefore an apt symbol for the life that never ends.

It is curious, even amusing, that Jesus should mention this doctrine of "living water" to a most unlikely person, a Samaritan woman of dubious life. But the place was appropriate: beside a deep well. This offers a contrast between the water from that well and the spring-water that he promises to give, although there is no spring nearby. Which prompts the woman to say: "Sir, you do not even have a bucket and the cistern is deep; where then can you get this living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us this cistern and drank from it himself with his children and his flocks?"

Jesus answers, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water that I shall give him, will never thirst." Then he adds: "The water I shall give will become a living spring of water welling up to eternal life." And the woman says, "Sir, give me this water" (*Jn 4:7-14*).

That is a prayer that we all must make, for this is the water Jesus refers to when he says, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink" (*Jn 7:37*). It is the water that the Seer sees in the Apocalypse:

Then the angel showed me the river of life-giving water, sparkling like crystal, flowing from the throne of the Lamb down the middle of its street. On either side of the river grew the tree of life...

Rv 22:1-2

This is the water predicted long ago by the Prophet: *Haurietis aquas ex fontibus salvatoris*:

*With joy you will draw water
at the fountain of salvation.*

Is 12:13

Pope Pius XII began his encyclical encouraging devotion to the Heart of Jesus with those words, *Haurietis Aquas*, for it is from the Crucified Savior, whose heart was pierced, that the "living water" of divine grace comes to mankind.

The Sign of Water

It is this rich background of meanings that underlies the ritual of baptism. Whether the neophyte is totally immersed in water (as in the ancient rite) or whether the water is merely poured on the head (as in the new) the symbolic action signifies the same thing, and the meaning is complex. And since baptism is a sacrament, it is an efficacious symbol that effects what it signifies.

Water washes: so baptism purifies. It cleanses the soul of every stain of sin.

Water nourishes life: so baptism "by water and the Holy Spirit" (*Jn 3:5*) engenders a rebirth into a new life.

Water drowns: so baptism destroys the "old man" and effects a participation in Christ's death and burial.

Water transforms: so baptism is a participation in Christ's resurrection. This participation in Christ's death and resurrection was of course more dramatically evident in the ancient rite of total immersion. But even in the new rite, the significance should be explained to parents, godparents and adult converts. As St. Paul says:

We were buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live in newness of life.

Rm 6:5

Holy Water

To many non-Catholics, the practice of sprinkling holy water is part of the mumbo jumbo of Catholic superstition. To some scholars, especially non-Catholics, the practice is merely a meaningless survival of pagan practice of Rome and Greece. Yet the use of holy water is richly symbolic.

It is indeed undeniable that lustrations were a common practice among the pagans. Like some other pagan practices, the Christian Church took the practice of sprinkling water on people and objects and gave it a new meaning.

The Church had done this in the case of some pagan festivals, as Roberto de Nobili points out in his defense of missionary adaptation. He cites the example of the Roman "*novendialia sacra*" of which our novenas are an adaptation. The bishops of the early Church tried to stop the pagan celebration of the Kalends of January: when they failed, they adopted the festival and made it the feast of the Circumcision of the Child Jesus (now the Solemnity of the Mother of God). Similarly, the pagan lupercalia celebrated with lighted torches at the beginning of February became the Christian Candlemass and the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

The Church has done something similar with the pagan lustrations. The liturgical sprinkling with holy water has been invested with the complexity of symbolic meanings mentioned above.

The sprinkling with holy water is a kind of prayer-by-gesture. Just as the ancient prophets spoke of God's blessings under the symbol of dew or rain or springs or flowing rivers, so, by sprinkling water on an object or on a person, we are asking God to rain down his blessings upon that person or object. No word is spoken, but the gesture itself is a prayer, eloquent because dramatic.

There is however one instance where words do accompany the sprinkling with holy water. This is in the new service for the dead:

I bless the body of M_____ with the water that recalls his baptism...

Far from being “mumbo jumbo” or superstition, the Catholic practice of sprinkling holy water to bless a house, a car, an article of devotion, or even a person, is an act of faith and of confidence in God’s mercy and providence. It is prayer-by-gesture, a form of prayer using the very human means of symbolic gesture.¹

¹The biblical quotations are from the New American Bible (Old Testament 1970, New Testament 2nd ed. 1986) but a few passages are from the Douai-Rheims-Challoner translation, where they seem better expressed.

Co-Opted Itinerancy

Roman Carter, O.P.

This article was first written with the help of an old diary several years ago. I was tempted in editing it to "salt and pepper" the contents with theological comments, but I decided not to do so as I think the text (like the experience behind it) speaks for itself. There is a local Church, each diocese on earth. It has within it from several to many Eucharistic enclaves all in reality under the Bishop who in turn is in full communion with the Holy See. The People of God are linked with Rome and with each other liturgically, doctrinally, in faith and in moral life through the sacramental reality they share with their Bishop and the priests he sends them whether as resident pastors or co-opted itinerants like myself.

From March 1975 to May 1986 I was involved in various apostolates in Australia. I also made many journeys to New Zealand and the South Sea Islands (on one of which, Choiseul in the Coral Sea, I served as supply missionary for a whole year). During that time, as previously when assigned to Spain, I spent a great deal of time with groups, communities and ministries of Catholic Charismatic Renewal. At the time of the reflections given below I was the Bishop's Liaison Priest for the Renewal in the Diocese of Armidale in the New England region of New South Wales.

In July 1985 at a meeting of these priests from throughout the country in Sydney, I met the Bishop of Rockhampton, whose diocese that is a central "slice" of the large northeastern and largely tropical State of Queensland. The Bishop was one of four or five Australian

prelates who had shown special interest in renewal movements and had given extraordinary encouragement to small and struggling groups of priests and laymen in remote places. He kindly invited me to his diocese in order that I might see at first hand how Charismatic Renewal was faring outside the larger ambiance of the big cities and even the more populated rural areas of the Australian South.

At the time of the Bishop's invitation I was Dean of St. Albert's College at the University of New England in New South Wales and Catholic Chaplain at the University.

In late March of 1986, I was able to venture northward to Queensland, to an area within that State completely new to me, a land of warm hearts and isolated homesteads, of hardworking priests and tenaciously loyal Catholic lay people, a place where religious Brothers and Sisters of several congregations continue the difficult tasks of education, catechetics and care for the sick and aged.

I arrived in Rockhampton, the see-city of the diocese, on Palm Sunday, March 23. The local Liaison Priest for C.C.R., welcomed me, invited me to concelebrate at a well-attended evening Mass and gave me the use of his car for the duration of my stay. This priest was then assistant in the Rockonia parish, north of Rockhampton. On Tuesday, March 25, I met with the Bishop and moved into his house. That evening he presided at the Mass of Chrism with twenty of his priests whom I then met for the first time. I would be meeting most of them again in places much smaller than Rockhampton and churches far less grand than the great sandstone-block Cathedral dedicated to St. Joseph there. On Wednesday I was back in Rockonia, giving a seminar on healing in the afternoon and offering a Mass for Healing with the Parish Priest and the assistant in the evening. We prayed for about sixty people afterwards, laying-on-hands and asking the Father in the name of His Risen Son and by the Power of the Holy Spirit to touch them in spirit, mind and body.

Early on Holy Thursday morning I started out alone in the liaison priest's car for the interior part of the diocese, for I was invited to spend the Holy Week Triduum and Easter morning at Woorabinda, an aboriginal reserve hidden away in the hills of some seventy kilometers from Rockhampton and reached in part by a gravel track through the woods and glades which the Australians casually call the "bush" or, more descriptively, the "outback."

About eight hundred people live at Woorabinda and perhaps as many as one hundred and twenty are nominally Catholic. Very few of the aboriginal people attend any church at all though there are Anglican and Australian Inland Mission (a fundamentalist Protestant group) as well as Catholic buildings in the place. The Anglicans have a resident clergyman and he sometimes gets forty people (mostly children) to his services. The Catholic Church contains the small Convent of Sisters of Mercy who were my kind hostesses. The two Sisters then in residence were both Irish members of the Brisbane Mercy Motherhouse. They prayed and worked day by day in remote Woorabinda. The Sisters and the small group of Catholics were visited by a priest every three weeks or so, and he replenished the Blessed Sacrament so that they could have daily Holy Communion. Only one or two others sometimes joined the Sisters on weekdays, notably the school-mistress whose brother is a Dominican.

Unfortunately, the day I came to Woorabinda was pay-day (when government checks are issued) and most of the community spent the afternoon and evening at the bar of the pub. Only about eight people made it to the evening Mass of the Lord's Supper, and only three of them (all under ten years of age) were very suitable candidates for the Washing of Feet (*Mandatum*). On Good Friday the whole town seemed to be either drunk or hung-over. The plight of the aboriginal people with alcoholism, poor housing and under nourishment and general physical and spiritual malaise is truly terrible.

At about five on the evening of Good Friday the Sisters and I decided to hold the ceremonies in a modified form and about ten people turned up. That evening we drove with about fifteen to a tree that resembles a crucifix where we sang hymns and prayed. This little "para-liturgy" was very touching – and for the people far more meaningful than the staid rites in church. And so, little by little, our numbers swelled. A Penitential Rite on Saturday morning brought almost twenty, most of whom confessed their sins to me. The Easter Vigil that night saw even more, and Mass on Easter morning was attended by nearly twenty-five people!

From Woorabinda I returned to Rockhampton where I celebrated an evening Mass attended by nearly four hundred persons. On Easter Monday we had Mass and "workshops" for Renewal leaders in the morning and a meditative "Emmaus Evening" in the

apse chapel of the Cathedral that night, followed by a session of prayers for healing. Both events were attended by about sixty people.

On Tuesday, April 1, I left Rockhampton for Mackay, a large town in the sugar-cane region of the central Queensland coast. The Parish Priest of St. Patrick's there was a long time participant in and promoter of Charismatic Renewal. His lively parish attracts many, especially for confessions, novenas and the daily mid-day Mass. At any hour of the day people are in the church reciting the Rosary or visiting the Blessed Sacrament, lighting candles at the shrines of the saints and generally behaving in ways typical here in the Philippines but unusual for Australia. The reason is that many of the people descend from immigrants from Italy and Malta. They are used to "warmer" Catholic practices than most English-speaking Catholics follow today.

Going out from Mackay I visited Charismatic Prayer Groups in nearby places where more than half of the participants were of Maltese origin. In Mackay itself the Maltese Franciscan Sisters of the Heart of Jesus run an excellent nursing home for the elderly, and the Sisters of Mercy of Rockhampton run a General Hospital. In both of these places I visited older Irish priests who were enthusiastic supporters of shared prayer and prayer for healing. In Mackay I met one morning with six secular priests from nearby parishes for a theological dialogue on renewal movements. Finally, on Friday, April 4, we had an area-wide Prayer Meeting at which I gave a teaching on a passage of St. Luke's Gospel and prayed over eighty persons for healing and other needs.

Saturday and Sunday, April 5 and 6, saw me in the mining town of Moranbah where an old friend from national retreat for priests was Parish Priest. The turn-out for my talks there was small in number, varying from twelve to twenty, but enthusiastic in spirit. On Saturday afternoon the seminar centered on healing-prayer techniques and this somewhat theoretical session was followed by a lengthy time of prayer after the Vigil Mass that evening. On Sunday morning I celebrated Mass at 8:00 a.m. and spent the morning giving a seminar in Christian Maturity based on three passages from the Letter to the Colossians. This was attended by about twenty persons and well received.

I had lunch with the Presentation Sisters, who direct the catechetical program in Moranbah and adjoining parishes. Catholic

schools are few and far between in many rural regions of Australia. After lunch I left for Emerald. Emerald, as the name implies, is in the center of a gem-exploring region which is also strong in agriculture and grazing. The Presentation Sisters run a large Catholic school in Emerald. The Parish with a handsome modern church was then in the hands of a warm-hearted pastor who is an excellent cook as well and who made me very welcome. Charismatic Renewal in Emerald had suffered a severe set-back due to a false prophetic movement in the region. This movement was headed by a misdirected feminist who claimed her daughter, not yet two years old, was an incarnation of the Holy Spirit sent into the world to represent the "Female Aspect of God" in the Last Days! It is sad to think that Catholics are so easily won over to such patent nonsense. Some followers of the nearly speechless to were refusing to attend Mass or receive the Sacraments because they claimed to have a living "goddess" in their midst. The Emerald Catholic prayer-meeting had been reduced at one point to a mere three persons who had remained loyal to the Church.

Daily Mass at Emerald was a joy, however. Good participation, liturgical emphases of the best kind and the warm leadership of the Parish Priest gave all a sense of hope amidst sorrow in that isolated place, invaded as it had been by the strange presence of a fantastic and fanatic cult.

From Emerald I ventured to the limits of humanly inhabited territory, the town of Longreach, beyond which stretch hundreds of kilometers of "Outback" more the haunts of sheep and cattle, kangaroos and other wild animals than of men and women. After addressing twenty-one parishioners (including the whole Parish Council). I was accompanied by the parish priest to a property sixty kilometers beyond the town. There a student from St. Albert's College had invited me to visit his family. I spent the night there and watched the sheep-shearing and wool-packing in the wool shed the next morning. Over four thousand animals were being deprived of their "coats" to give woolen garments to people as far away as Italy! The solitude of the place and the loyalty of the family to the Catholic Church were certainly noteworthy. Since my visit our former student has entered the Christian Brothers.

From Longreach I went to Barcaldine where the parish priest was the brother of the pastor of Maranbah. There I found only three

at the Charismatic gathering, but even so there was a good spirit of *prayer and service*. I celebrated Mass, addressed the St. Vincent de Paul Society and took part in a birthday celebration in Barcaldine, before returning to Emerald on April 9. The next day I visited two small towns, Blackwater and Springsure where the young Parish Priests made me most welcome. I was able to talk to groups (never more than twenty-five in number) about the theology of the Holy Spirit in the Church today and the need for prayer in all of Christian life.

By Friday I was back in Emerald where about twenty people came to an evening session on prayer. I hoped the fear of many Catholics that all enthusiasm leads to heresy would be somewhat modified by my talk and presence in the "Gemfield" region. Still I had to admit I was relieved to return to the comfort of the Bishop's House in Rockhampton and the "safety" of the Cathedral whose administrator asked me to celebrate Mass on Saturday evening. How warming it was to have a choir singing and hundreds of people in the congregation after being in the sparsely populated hinterland for so many days.

On Sunday, April 13, I drove southward to some more small places, largely coal-mining towns, set in a hilly landscape. The first was Biloela where I met the first instance on this trip of truly ecumenical participation in Charismatic Renewal. In the town Catholics and Anglicans met together for praise and sharing and tactfully acknowledged differences without stressing them. Unfortunately the charity and tact of this place and these groups is all too rare in Australia. Many Pentecostal bodies, some mere "sects," have intruded themselves into even small centers. There they have wrought havoc with existing Churches both Catholic and Protestant through campaigns of incessant proselytizing and inaccurate, unscholarly fundamentalist Bible teaching. Such intrusion has made for much bitterness and unfriendliness and goes against the genial, tolerant spirit of the Australians in general. So it was, in contrast, good to see some inter-church cooperation under a better guise and guidance.

From Biloela, where the parish priest would be welcoming me back in a few days, I went on to Monto, a little town with a parish priest with a big heart. Monto has a strong Prayer Group and the

Masses I celebrated there on Monday night and Tuesday morning were well-attended. The pastor had instilled a great desire for healing and prophetic gifts in his congregation.

From Monto I went to Moura, where the parish priest had charge of a vast area which included the aboriginal reserve of Woorabinda and several small towns. At a meeting of seventeen people, three were Filipinos, ladies married to Australians. What a lonely place Moura must be for them, used as they are to devotions to the Santo Niño, Our Lady of Perpetual Help and so many saints! From Moura I returned to Biloela where on Wednesday, April 16, a Votive Mass for Healing drew over a hundred people to the church and many stayed on for individual prayer afterwards.

From Biloela I drove to the coast. There, at Gladstone, I was to stay until Saturday morning. The Catholic parish of Gladstone continues under the care of the Marist Fathers, who have done so much for the Church in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific Islands. Gladstone is a thriving center, and there we had Masses for Healing on Thursday and Friday evenings, April 17 and 18. On Friday morning I addressed a group of fifty ladies from Renewal groups in the town and from nearby who had the custom of coming together once a month to sing, pray and share, and to combat the bad scriptural teaching of the more militant fundamentalist sects.

I was happy on April 19 to return to Rockhampton for a meeting of the Diocesan Service Committee of the Renewal and to see again many friends from the groups I had visited thus far. On Sunday, April 20, the leader of the group from Bundaberg – the “Rum Capitol of Australia” in the sugar cane growing region further south – accompanied me to his home town. There in the large Church of the Holy Rosary I celebrated an evening “Folk Mass” for the Parish Priest. On Monday we had a Holy Hour, Benediction and prolonged prayers for healing. Then on Tuesday morning I met with clergy from nearby parishes. On Wednesday, April 22, I returned to Rockhampton.

That night we had a Mass and Rally in the Cathedral with about two hundred and sixty persons attending. Many came by bus or private car from places I had visited in the past month. How happy I was to see two aboriginal ladies from the Woorabinda community

with a Mercy Sister, and so many other people from fairly remote places, as well as loyal supporters from the bigger coastal towns.

When I flew away from Rockhampton on Thursday April 24 I felt that I had been privileged to see something which was new for me: new and different and very vital both in the Catholic Church and in Charismatic Renewal. Everything was on a relatively small scale. But an air of joy and hope and trust in God pervaded it all. My stay in the Diocese of Rockhampton was a "time of grace" for me and I hope it was for the Bishop, priests and people, too.

As I look back more than five years later I realize how "formative" this experience "off the beaten track" was for me. All too often our current emphasis on the local Church (sound as such an emphasis may be in principle) makes us forgetful of the greater mission of the Church beyond our geographic peripheries. An occasional "venture into the interior," even through the written word of an article like this, may both widen our horizons and give us pause for hopeful prayer.

Parable of the Prodigal Son Invites Us to Rejoice Over Repentant Sinners*

John Navone, S.J.

The parable of the Prodigal Son (*Lk* 15:11-32) is an invitation to share in joy over the conversion of sinners. Christ invites his hearers to share in his joy of finding and saving what was lost. His attitude contrasts with that of the Pharisees who object to his welcoming publicans and sinners (*Lk* 15:1-2). The joy to be shared is principally Christ's joy manifested here and now as a reflection of heavenly joy. It is evident from the parable of the Prodigal Son that not all who should share the joy of the father, who has found what was lost, actually do share it when the opportunity is offered to them. The parable ends on an upbeat note: the elder son is only gently rebuked; he has tactfully been offered an invitation in the father's explanation of his own joy, and we await his final reply. Will he accept?

The parable, an expression of God's mercy shown in Jesus' ministry, affirms the sort of love that must exist and be manifested between a father and his own son. Christ calls his hearers to conversion (*metanoia*), a change of outlook and affection. Just as the elder son of the parable provided the father with an occasion to explain his joy, so the Pharisees provide Jesus with an occasion to explain God's plan of salvation which goes beyond strict justice because it is founded on intimate personal relationships. It is love

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which is fully justified. The righteous must learn that love bestowed on the sinner is not an injustice to them; rather, it is something which they themselves must share if they are to understand the merciful ways of divine favor. This, in turn, implies a change of heart or conversion on their part.

Jesus bears witness in his dealings with tax collectors and sinners that God himself is at work and is gathering to himself his community. Jesus' activity is the way in which God's mercy is seen and realized. Jesus' divine forgiveness and divine joy is the theme of his own parable on that divine forgiveness and joy. The parable expresses the good news of the joy to be shared here and now. It is the joy of Jesus himself as he gathers in and welcomes sinners. It is he who comes to search and save what was lost (cf. *Lk* 19:1-10), and he implicitly invites the Pharisees to share with him the joy of his find. And it is Jesus to whom the character portrayal of the father most immediately applies; those who have "sinned against heaven and before you" (15:18,21) are those who are "drawing near" (15:1) to him. Those who seek an explanation, even though they are not entitled to one, are tactfully advised about their own need of a change of heart (conversion) and are invited to share in the joy that simply must be under these circumstances.

The circumstances which evoke this apparently disproportionate joy over what is found are, in turn, rooted in a set of personal relationships and dispositions. The intimate personal triad of father-son-brother is the heart of this parable, and perhaps the core of its theology. The literary fabric of the parable is such that this triple relationship is raised against the background of a servant-or-slave relationship to an owner. The younger son learned how good his father was when he looked for mercy from citizens of a country where he was a stranger, a serf, a veritable prisoner of his job. Evidently, his masters thought more of fattening their swine than of caring for their swineherds. And so the younger son's change of heart arose from the brutal facts which prompted self-pity. His change of heart was prompted by the thought that even the hired hands of his father's house received many times over what his own starvation diet provided. But the perfect expression of his contrition sprang from a memory of the sort of man his father was, and found utterance in his confession that he had sinned against heaven and before his father, and was unworthy to be called his son. The operative notion is his

unworthiness to be called his father's son. The father's reaction is precisely that which his title signifies. He does not treat his son as an honored guest, but as a son. The ring he has put on his finger suggests a signet ring worn by the householder's son; the sandals distinguish the free-man from the slave, and the best robe in the house completes the picture of one restored to the full status of sonship. The precise reason for the feast is stated in the emphatic phrase: "this son of mine" (15:22).

The elder son is introduced at the point of feasting and merry-making. He has not been consulted or even warned in advance of this exceptional event. He seeks an explanation and is considerably irritated when informed of the reason: "Your brother has come back, and your father..." (15:27). His father reasons with him gently in words which must be supposed equivalent to an invitation to participate in the reunion feast. The elder son justifies himself, and in so doing discloses his real motivation. He is not merely envious. He simply fails to comprehend what it means to be a father or a son. His is the mentality of a servant or slave: "Look at all these years I have been working for you as a slave" (15:29). He regards the conduct of his father's business as a matter of precept, not of love: "I have never overstepped a command of yours"; and he seems to expect special treatment by way of payment ("at least a kid...") for the services rendered. Even his judgment on his brother's sin echoes his own sense of values and his lack of insight into the heart of his own father: "This son of yours devoured your livelihood..." (15:30). He sees his father as one who was deprived of property by a libertine son, a good-for-nothing who is depriving him (and perhaps the elder son) of even more. The father saw himself as one who lost and then regained a son — as much as if he had come back from the dead. The elder son's complaint thus reflects his judgment that the feast was meant to show what the younger son was worth (as the kid he felt he himself should have received would have been given in payment of what his long-standing services were worth). In fact, the feast was an expression of the father's heartfelt joy.

Since he cannot understand his father's love for the wayward son precisely as *his son*, he fails to grasp his own relationship to that other son; he even refuses to call that other son "brother." When he pointedly refers to his brother as "this son of yours" (15:30), his father replies by calling him with equal, but much more muted and tactful

pointedness: "this brother of yours" (15:32). But the rebuke is administered with consummate mildness. For the elder son is affectionately called "*teknon*," which is more affectionate than the regular Greek word for son (*uie*). He is told that all the father has is his. He is advised that he is simply not in a position to be paid as though he were a hired man; much less is he expected to work as a slave. He should have spontaneously joined in the rejoicing as one who understood how his own father's heart went out to the other son who was, after all, his own brother.

Jesus' rebuke to the mercenary-minded Pharisees (cf. *Lk* 16:14) could scarcely have been more mild or more appropriate to the situation as Luke has chosen to describe it: on the occasion of Jesus' eating and drinking with sinners, and his receiving them with joyful anticipation, the Pharisees voiced shocked surprise. Should they not share in Jesus' joy by changing their dispositions towards their brother and towards him who they are to recognize as having a father's heart for all?

This is a parable of God's redemptive love for all. Jesus is the one in and through whom the heavenly joy is shown to humankind: the Father is thus seen in and through Jesus' contact or "mediation" with humankind. Jesus is the efficacious sign of the reconciliation and new life (15:32) offered to all. The divine-and-human love (presented as a totality), since it is seen as realized in the action of one-and-the-same Person) is also presented as the motive, for instance, of the younger son's act of perfect love and contrition (15:21).

Jesus tells this parable to transform our way of thinking, feeling and acting with regard to ourselves, others, and God. The parable is an invitation to share the mind and heart of Jesus himself, to participate in his way of being together with all others, divine and human. The Christian community of faith recounts the parable with the same transformational intent of its Lord whose gift of the Spirit enables us to grasp the meaning of the parable and embody it in our lives. The Spirit of Jesus reminds us of this parable and empowers us to embody its meaning and share it with others as the bearers of God's reconciling love, joy, and compassion. Jesus, the Parable of God, communicates his Spirit in his parables. God speaks in the parables of his Word incarnate and inspires us to respond to them through the gift of his Spirit. The Word and Spirit of God transform

all human life as the Ultimate Truth and Love which alone can satisfy the human mind and heart. Although we are ever restless for the fulfillment of all humankind at the consummation, we even now recognize something of that Ultimate Truth and Love in the parables and Spirit of Jesus Christ.

Decree Promulgated

Congregation for the Clergy

It is the Church's constant practice, as Paul VI wrote in the *Motu Proprio Firma In Traditione* that "the faithful, desiring in a religious and ecclesial spirit to participate more intimately in the Eucharistic sacrifice, add to it a form of sacrifice of their own by which they contribute in a particular way to the needs of the Church and especially to the sustenance of her ministers" (AAS, vol. 66 [1974], p. 308).

Formerly this contribution consisted predominantly in gifts in kind; in our day it has become almost exclusively monetary. However, the motive and purpose of the faithful's offerings have remained the same and have also been sanctioned by the new Code of Canon Law (cf. canons 945, para. 1 and 946).

Because the matter directly affects the Most Blessed Sacrament, even the slightest appearance of profit or simony would cause scandal. Therefore the Holy See has always followed the evolution of this pious tradition with attention, with opportune interventions to provide for adaptations to the changing social and cultural situations, in order to prevent or correct any eventual abuses connected with these adaptations, wherever they might occur (cf. canons 947 and 1385).

In recent times many bishops have appealed to the Holy See for clarification about the celebration of Masses for what are called "collective" intentions, according to a rather recent practice.

It is true that the faithful have always especially in economically depressed regions, had the practice of giving the priest modest offerings, without requesting expressly to have a single Mass celebrated for a particular intention. In such cases it is licit to combine the various offerings in order to celebrate as many Masses as would correspond to the fixed diocesan stipend.

The faithful are also free to combine their intentions and offerings for the celebration of a single Mass for these intentions.

Quite different, however, is the case of those priests who, indiscriminately gathering the offerings of the faithful which are destined for the celebration of Masses according to particular intentions, *accumulate them in a single offering and satisfy them with a single Mass*, celebrated according to what is called a “collective” intention.

The arguments in favor of this new practice are specious and pretentious if not reflecting an erroneous ecclesiology. In any case this use can run the serious risk of not satisfying an obligation of justice towards the donors of the offerings and progressively spread and extinguish in the entire Christian people the awareness and understanding of the motives and purpose of making an offering for the celebration of the holy Sacrifice for particular intentions, therefore depriving the sacred ministers who still live from these offerings, of a necessary means of support and depriving many particular Churches of the resources for their apostolic activity.

Therefore, to execute a mandate received by the Supreme Pontiff, the Congregation for the Clergy, which has the jurisdiction for the discipline of this delicate subject, has carried out an extensive consultation on the matter, including the opinions of the conferences of bishops. After careful examination of the responses and the various aspects of the complex problem, in collaboration with other interested curial departments, this congregation has established as follows:

Article 1

§1. According to canon 948, “separate Masses are to be applied for the intentions for which an individual offering, even if small, has been made and accepted.” Therefore the priest who accepts the

offering for a Mass for a particular intention is bound *ex iustitia* to satisfy personally the obligation assumed (cf. canon 949) or to commit its fulfillment to another priest, according to the conditions established by law (cf. canons 954-955).

§2. Priests who transgress this norm assume the relative moral responsibility if they *indistinctly collect offerings for the celebration of Masses for particular intentions and, combining them in a single offering and, without the knowledge of those who have made the offering, satisfy them with a single Mass celebrated according to an intention which they call "collective."*

Article 2

§1. In cases in which the people making the offering, *have been previously explicitly informed and have freely consented to combining their offerings in a single offering, their intentions can be satisfied with a single Mass celebrated according to a "collective" intention.*

§2. In this case it is necessary that the place and time for the celebration of this Mass, *which is not to be more than twice a week, be made public.*

§3. The bishops in whose dioceses these cases occur are to keep in mind that this practice is an exception to the canonical law in effect; wherever the practice spreads excessively, also on the basis of erroneous ideas of the meaning of offerings for Masses, it must be considered an abuse which could progressively lead to the faithful's discontinuation of the practice of giving offerings for the celebration of Masses for individual intentions, thus causing the loss of a most ancient practice which is salutary for individual souls and the whole Church.

Article 3

§1. In cases described in art. 2 §1, it is licit for the celebrant to keep the amount of offering established by the diocese (cf. canon 950).

§2. Any amount exceeding this offering shall be consigned to the ordinary as specified in canon 951 §1, who will provide for its destination according to the ends established by law (cf. canon 946).

Article 4

Especially in shrines or places of pilgrimage which usually receive many offerings for the celebration of Masses, the rectors, bound in conscience, must attentively see to it that the norms of the universal law on the subject (cf. principally canons 954-956) and those of this decree are accurately applied.

Article 5

§1. Priests who receive a great number of offerings for particular intentions for Masses, *e.g.*, on the Feast of the Commemoration of All the Faithful Departed, or on other special occasions, being unable to satisfy them personally within a year's time (cf. canon 953), rather than refusing them, and thus frustrating the devout intention of those making the offering and keeping them from realizing their good purpose, should forward them to other priests (cf. canon 955) or to their own ordinary (cf. canon 956).

§2. If in these or similar circumstances that which is described in art. 2 §1 of this decree takes place, the priests must be attentive to the dispositions of art. 3.

Article 6

To diocesan bishops in particular falls the duty to promptly and clearly making known these norms, which are valid for secular and religious clergy, and seeing to their observance.

Article 7

It is also necessary that the faithful should be instructed in this matter through a specific catechesis, whose main points are as follows: the deep theological meaning of the offering given to the priest for the celebration of the Eucharistic sacrifice, the goal of which is especially to prevent the danger of scandal through the appearance of buying and selling the sacred; the ascetical importance of almsgiving in Christian life, which Jesus himself taught, of which the offering for the celebration of Masses is an outstanding form; the sharing of goods, through which by their offering for Mass intentions

the faithful contribute to the support of the sacred ministers and the fulfillment of the Church's apostolic activity.

On 22 January 1991 the Supreme Pontiff approved the norms of the present decree in their specific form and ordered that they be immediately promulgated and take effect.

From the Vatican, 22 February 1991.

CARDINAL ANTONIO INNOCENTI

Prefect

ARCHBISHOP GILBERTO AGUSTONI

Secretary

Understanding the New Decree

The decree published above is the result of consultation with all the bishops' conferences, whose responses were elaborated by an interdepartmental committee of the Roman Curia. The Supreme Pontiff then approved, in its specific form, this decree which goes into effect according to the norm of canon 8, §1 of the Code of Canon Law.

It responds to the repeated requests of many bishops who have asked the Holy See for clarification and directives in regard to the celebration of Masses which are commonly referred to as *multi-intentional* or *collective*.

The decree is divided into two parts: the first part, the introduction, expresses the reasons; the second part contains the dispositions.

First of all, it states the substantial identity of the motives and goals for which the faithful, following an uninterrupted tradition to be honored for its antiquity and meaning, ask the priest to celebrate a Mass for a particular intention, offering them a recompense – which in our day is almost exclusively monetary. In law this recompense is referred to as a *stipend*, but it is also commonly called an *offering*. The introduction always contains the salient point on which the practice which is the object of the document deviates from the norm that is in effect.

In fact, canon law stipulates that every priest who accepts the obligation to celebrate a Mass for the donor's intention must do so, under an obligation of justice, in person or by entrusting its fulfillment to another priest, regardless of the amount of the offering.

The anomalous practice consists in accepting or amassing indiscriminately the offerings for the celebration of Masses according to the intention of the donor, accumulating the offerings and intentions, and pretending to satisfy the obligation deriving from them through the celebration of a single Mass for an intention which is in reality *plurima* or "collective." Nor is it valid to claim that in these cases the intentions of those making the offering are specified during the celebration, because it cannot be seen in what way this procedure satisfies the obligation expressed in canon 948 of the Code of Canon Law to say as many Masses as there are intentions.

In order to illustrate more clearly the special nature of this anomaly, the decree makes reference to two cases which are apparently similar to a pluri-intentional Mass, but which in reality are very different and therefore are morally licit.

In one case it is a question of a practice which dates to time immemorial, in certain poor regions where the faithful give the priest modest offerings, sometimes still gifts in kind, not to request the celebration of Masses for their individual, particular intentions, but rather to contribute in general to the Church's public worship and the support of the priest himself, knowing quite well that he will then celebrate Mass for their intentions and needs, as canon law does in fact prescribe for bishops and priests with the Masses *pro populo* and which is also suggested by sensitivity and priestly charity.

The other case involves the faithful who spontaneously get together and agree to have one or more Masses celebrated for their common or various intentions, which in reality flow together voluntarily into a single intention, and offer the relative amount. No one can fail to see the radical difference between these practices and the "multi-intentional" Mass spoken of above.

The introduction also mentions the arguments given by those who support this new, illicit practice: it calls these arguments "specious and pretentious if not reflecting an erroneous ecclesiology." In fact, they often say that the Eucharistic celebration is an action of the

Church and is therefore eminently communitarian, and that it would also be alien to the very nature of the Mass to "privatize it," affixing particular intentions, or to seek to channel its benefits for private purposes.

These arguments reveal the doctrinal confusion of a certain ecclesiology about the infinite merits of the one sacrifice of the cross, the celebration of the sacrament of that one sacrifice which Christ entrusted to the Church, and about the *thesaurus Ecclesiae* which the Church has at her disposal. Nor can we forget that Catholic doctrine has constantly taught that the fruits of the Eucharistic sacrifice can be attributed to various purposes: first of all to those whom the Church herself names in the "intercessions" of the Eucharistic Prayer, then to the celebrating minister (the so-called ministerial fruit), then to *those making the offering*, etc.

The priests who do not accept the commitment to celebrate Mass for particular intentions are not aware that they are precluding people from an excellent way of participating actively in the celebration of the memorial of the Lord, which Pope Paul VI himself recalled in the *Motu Proprio "Firma In Traditione,"* precisely through an offering given to the priest. This is one of the spiritual harms to be avoided which the decree also speaks of (cf. art. 2 § 3).

There are also some people who theorize about the new and more adequate systems of clergy support which are, in fact, sanctioned by the new legislation. According to these people priests no longer need Mass intentions to satisfy their own material needs. Some of them even hold that the old system offends dignity of the ministers of the altar.

This is one of the many illusions or utopian ideas that lack reference to reality. In fact, it has been demonstrated that the greater part of the world's priests, in contemporary society, too, still draw their own support from Mass offerings. Many other apostolic activities of the Church as well – from missions to parishes – are partially or totally supported from the income of the Mass "stipends" or "offerings." Only those who want to take offense, therefore, or those who are afflicted with a strange type of puritanism, can hold that the ancient traditional custom of using Mass offerings support the clergy or the Church's works is anachronistic or improper.

It is also necessary to devote due attention to the pastoral content of the decree in that part (art. 7) which invites us to use the occasion of the promulgation of these norms to promote an appropriate catechesis with the intention of countering some preconceived ideas in this area which, because of ignorance or inaccuracy, recur in a certain pseudo-religious culture.

The last article indicates some of the points for such a catechesis: repropose and explain the true meaning of the offering which the faithful make to the priest for the celebration of Masses for a particular intention; the value of almsgiving in Christian life, because of its great ability to make satisfaction; and lastly, the effective participation of the faithful in the Church's mission through a way of sharing represented by the offerings for the celebration of Masses which are distributed throughout the world.

For a proper reflection on this entire delicate topic it is good to recall also the directives given by the Second Vatican Council in the decree *Presbyterorum Ordinis*: "Priests, just like bishops, are to use moneys acquired by them on the occasion of their exercise of some ecclesiastical office primarily for their own decent support and the fulfillment of the duties of their state. They should be willing to devote whatever is left over to the good of the Church or to works of charity" (n. 17). Mass stipends fall into this category.

GILBERTO AGUSTONI

Priestly Formation Institute (Lyceum of Aparri)

Congregatio de Institutione Catholica

I. Acknowledgement of Canonical Status¹

Your Excellency,

We have received from Fr. Ranhilio C. Aquino, Rector of the Priestly Formation Institute at the Lyceum of Aparri, a letter dated 29th January 1990 in which he asks us about the juridical status of the Seminary with his question "We would therefore like to inquire whether we need the permission of the Holy See to accept candidates from other ecclesiastical territories and what other requirements there might be in this regard."

At present, this Seminary is *de iure* diocesan. If it wishes to become *de iure* regional, then the consent of the Holy See must be obtained which comes in the form of approval of the Seminary's statutes. However, a diocesan seminary can function *de facto* as regional while remaining *de iure* diocesan in order to accomodate the wishes of other bishops who want their students to be formed there. If the number of students from other dioceses grows in significant number, then it may be appropriate to change the status of the Seminary from diocesan to regional *de iure*. This is a judgment to be made by the Ordinary in consultation with fellow Bishops. At the

¹Letter dated Rome, 13th February 1990 to His Excellency, The Most Reverend Diosdado Talamayan, Archbishop of Tuguegarao (Prot. N. 245/90/2).

moment we are well satisfied with this Seminary's juridical status. We are pleased that it will accept other students. We shall support it and watch its development with interest over the years to come.

Wishing Your Excellency and the Seminary every blessing in God and assuring you of our prayers.

Yours devotedly in
Our Lord,

+ José Luciano Martínez, Secret.

II. Commendation²

Your Excellency,

We have received from the Congregation for Bishops that portion of your recent quinquennial report which pertains to the competence of this Congregation for Catholic Education. We have studied it with interest and attention, and, while we thank you for it most sincerely, in this particular reply we would like to offer you some comments on the formation of your candidates for the priesthood.

We are pleased with the progress of San Jacinto Minor Seminary, and we would extend our warm appreciation to the Rector and his colleagues for all that they are accomplishing. They are laying the foundations that are essential to the enterprise of priestly formation, and we wish them every success. We are particularly pleased with the progress of the Priestly Formation Institute and the Lyceum of Aparri. This has been a very important initiative, and it is meeting with considerable success. We are well satisfied with its focus and balance, its Rule and Governance. We would extend our congratulations to the Director and our warm appreciation and support to his colleagues. We expect this seminary to grow in the years ahead.

²Letter dated Rome, 27th August 1990 to His Excellency, Most Rev. Diosdado Talamayan, Archbishop of Tuguegarao (Prot. N. 1155/90).

To all of your students at every level, pre-college, college and theologate, we would extend our good wishes and our hope that they will pray the Lord of the Harvest to call them to the priesthood and to give them all the gifts of nature and grace that such a vocation requires.

Wishing your Excellency every blessing and assuring you of our prayers.

Yours sincerely in Jesus Christ,

Pio Laghi, Pro-Prefect.

+ Jose' Saraiva Martins, Secret.

General Absolution: Its Exceptional Character

Excelso Garcia, O.P.

The title of this study is *General Absolution: Its Exceptional Character*. The clause: *Its Exceptional Character*, seems to insinuate that general absolution has in itself some special or extraordinary grace or virtue. Undoubtedly, general absolution produces the extraordinary effect of remitting sin, venial and mortal, to penitents who are worthy and well disposed to receive it. Nobody will deny this exceptional value of general absolution. Being the essence of sacramental penance it has this exceptional effect *ex opere operato*, automatically.

However, the phrase: *its exceptional character*, applied to general absolution as such does not connote or mean any other special grace or spiritual effect produced in the penitents to whom it is imparted. Rather, it simply conveys the meaning that general absolution is a *different form* of sacramental absolution by reason of *the way it is imparted* to penitents, producing, like any sacramental absolution in the soul, reconciliation with God and with the Church. The way it is given is not the usual, normal and ordinary way in which individual sacramental absolution is imparted. That is why general absolution is not and cannot be said to be the ordinary and normal form of reconciliation of souls with God and with the Church. It is an *exceptional form* imparted only on some rare and extraordinary occasions which are carefully determined by the Church's laws.

This is precisely the aim and purpose of our study: to see what are the norms governing the use of this exceptional form of general

absolution, so that it might produce in souls the spiritual effects for which the Lord instituted the Sacrament of Penance. We will feel immensely gratified if our efforts in writing these lines should help all pastors of souls who read them to be faithful in following the Church's laws with a spirit of fidelity to the Lord and a spirit of obedience to His Church.

I. The Church's Keys to Remit Sin

1. The granting of the power to absolve from sin is manifested with unmistakable clearness in the Gospel of Saint John. The risen Christ before His Ascension to heaven says to the Apostles: "As the Father has sent Me, so I send you." Then He breathes on them and says: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound" (20:21-23).

2. There have always been in the past as there will be in the future some who deny to the Church this power to forgive sins. They follow the same reasoning of the Scribes and Pharisees who denied it to Christ Himself. Sin is a personal offense against God, they say. Then only God can forgive sin. The answer to them should always be the answer given by Christ. "Some men came along carrying a paralytic on a mat... Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic: 'Your sins are forgiven you.' The Scribes and Pharisees thought: 'Who can forgive sins but God alone?' Jesus, knowing their reasoning, said to them: 'Which is easier to say: Your sins are forgiven you, or to say: Get up and walk. In any case to make it clear to you that the *Son of Man* has authority on earth to forgive sins... I say to you (to the paralytic): Get up, take up your mat with you and return to your house' " (Mt 9:2-7). Let us note carefully the words used by Jesus. He, being the Son of God, could have forgiven sins on His own divine authority. But he rather preferred to act as the *Son of Man* and forgive sins by an act of His human will, as God's representative.

Thus, those who have denied in the past and still deny today the power of remitting sins to the Church should know or remember that the Church is Christ's Mystical Body and exercises this power in the name of Christ, true God and true man. The answer to their denial is: God entrusted the power to forgive sins to Christ and through Christ to the Apostles and to their successors in the priesthood. Saint

Paul says: "God has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation" (2 Co 5:18). The Council of Trent defined that the power to forgive sins given to the Apostles is the same power exercised in the Sacrament of Penance.

3. When considering the Church's power to remit sin, we have to bear in mind that it is one thing to assert that the power of remitting sin was granted to the Church, and another to say that a full realization of what was granted was in the consciousness of the Church from the beginning. The first thing is undeniable: Christ gave the power to forgive sins to the Apostles and to their successors in the priesthood. This notwithstanding, the Church was not given instantly by Christ a full knowledge and a complete realization, understanding and perception as to how ample the power given to her by Christ was. In other words, from the beginning the Church has been conscious of the power to forgive sins granted to her by Christ, but as to how ample this power is, it has had to be searched out and discovered through a conscientious and scrupulous study of God's will as manifested in the divine revelation and through a true and sincere zeal for the spiritual welfare of souls. This is the reason why we see that the exercise of this power is continuously evolving and unfolding as the circumstances of the world change and the spiritual needs of the souls require. One thing is certain: "the Church has faithfully celebrated the Sacrament of Penance throughout the centuries in varying ways, but always retaining the essential elements" (S. Congr. for Divine Worship: Decree of December 2, 1973: *cfr. Rite of Penance*).

4. This is the reason too, why Vatican II expressed the need to revise the formulas of the Sacrament of Penance by saying: "The rite and formulas of the Sacrament of Penance are to be revised in such a way that they may more clearly express both the nature and effect of this Sacrament" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 72). As a consequence the Sacred Congregation for Divine Worship carefully prepared the new *Rite of Penance* which came into force on December 2, 1973.

5. The new *Rite of Penance*, a revision of the *Roman Ritual* provides three different rites, which while always keeping intact the essential elements, make it possible to adapt the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance to particular pastoral circumstances.

The main changes found in the new Rite of Penance are:

a. *Rite for the reconciliation of individual penitents.* It is the ordinary and normal form of individual confession and absolution;

b. *Rite for reconciliation of several penitents with individual confession and absolution.* It differs from the first rite in the preparation only, since confession and absolution are individually performed in both rites;

c. *Rite for reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution.* It coincides only with the second rite in the reconciliation or preparation, which is done in common for a number of penitents. However, it differs from the first and second rites with regards to confession and absolution, which are general for all the penitents in this third rite.

Pope John Paul II describes these three rites as follows: "The first form – *reconciliation of individual penitents* — is the only normal and ordinary way of celebrating the Sacrament, and it cannot and must not be allowed to fall into disuse or to be neglected. The second form – *reconciliation of a number of penitents with individual confession and absolution* – even though in the preparatory act it helps to give greater emphasis to the community aspects of the Sacrament, is the same as the first form in the culminating sacramental act, namely individual confession and individual absolution of sins. It can thus be regarded as equal to the first form as regards the formality of the rite. The third form, however – *reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution* – is exceptional in character. It is, therefore, not left to free choice, but is regulated by special discipline" (Pope John Paul II, *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*, n. 32, Dec. 2, 1984: see *Boletín Ecclesiástico*, 1985, p. 660).

The topic of our study is restricted to the Church's laws regulating the general absolution imparted to a number of Christian faithful collectively. In subsequent articles we shall delve more deeply into and analyze to a greater extent the problems arising from the history, magisterial teaching and both proper and improper appropriation of the concepts and uses of general absolution.

Cases and Inquiries

Excelso Garcia, O.P.

General Absolution

Luzviminda, a member of the Legion of Mary, bothered by her conscience for having procured an abortion, but ashamed to confess it, has thrice attended big gatherings of the faithful, where the priest who addressed them imparted general absolution collectively after his talk, so that they could take Holy Communion during the Mass celebrated by him. Of course, she received the absolution without confession and approached the altar to receive Holy Communion, like others did. May I ask you the following questions:

1. *What is the present Church law on general absolution?*
2. *Can you give us an explanation of such law, pointing out its main difficulties, if there are any?*
3. *Can any priest decide on his own initiative when general absolution may be imparted?*
4. *Can you foresee serious problems as a result of imparting general absolution?*
5. *What can you say about Luzviminda's attitude?*

A Priest

Our consultant is practically asking for a commentary on the Church's existing law on general absolution. Five questions are raised by him. An answer to them has to be somewhat extensive, especially if the possible problems contemplated are to be clarified.

The case of Luzviminda has an easy solution, however, and we prefer to start with it. The answer to the other four questions will appear in subsequent issues of the *Boletín Eclesiástico*.

Luzviminda's attitude cannot be approved. She is evading the fulfillment of her serious obligation to make an individual sacramental confession, because she is ashamed to confess the mortal sin of abortion which she has procured. This attitude has been reproved by the Church on several occasions. The Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary said on March 25, 1944: "Priests, before imparting general absolution, should clearly inform the faithful that they are seriously forbidden to evade the fulfillment of the obligation to confess mortal sins not yet confessed before in the sacrament of Penance, by seeking another occasion to receive again general absolution. Both divine and ecclesiastical laws impose a serious obligation to make an individual sacramental confession of all mortal sins not yet confessed and remitted" (AAS, 1944, pp. 155-156). This norm was repeated again by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith on June 16, 1972 (cf. *Boletín Eclesiástico*, 1972, pp. 427-432).

Individual sacramental confession is the only normal and ordinary way to obtain the remission of mortal sins. The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith made clear on June 16, 1972 that divine law, as interpreted by the Church is not respected and followed by those who are absolved only in a general absolution. Individual integral confession with its absolution is the only normal way to reconcile sinners to God and to His Church, when such confession is possible (*ibid.*). Such is the case of Luzviminda who has evaded the sacramental confession by receiving general absolution only.

General absolution may be imparted in exceptional cases only, *i.e.* in certain situations already determined in the Church's law. Luzviminda's case cannot be included in those situations. She could make an individual sacramental confession, but she has evaded it out of shame. She thinks or pretends to believe that, by joining a gathering of faithful who will receive general absolution, she will also be benefited by this exceptional way of obtaining God's forgiveness.

In order to impart general absolution the present Church law requires, outside danger of death, the existence of "a grave necessity, *i.e.* that given the number of penitents, there are not enough confes-

sors available to properly hear the individual confessions of the penitents present within an appropriate time, so that without fault of their own the penitents are deprived of the sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time." Undoubtedly, Luzviminda has a great necessity of obtaining God's forgiveness, but this is not the kind of "serious necessity" mentioned in the law. She could remedy her serious necessity by making an individual sacramental confession, which she has willfully avoided "for being ashamed."

Besides, Luzviminda has attended three times the big gatherings of the faithful in order to receive general absolution, which is clearly against the Church's law. Canon 963 reads as follows: "A person whose grave sins are forgiven by a general absolution is, as soon as possible, when the opportunity occurs, to make an individual confession before receiving another general absolution." It is surprising that Luzviminda has repeated the same wrong or mistake three times. Is it that she has committed other mortal sins after having received the first and second general absolution, thinking that she could obtain God's pardon by receiving again and again general absolution? Or, is it that she has already discarded definitely the individual sacramental confession and has decided to continue receiving general absolution only? In either case her attitude is obviously wrong.

Pope John Paul II says in his Pastoral Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Poenitentia*: "It must not be forgotten that the reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution is exceptional in character. It is therefore not left to free choice, but regulated by special discipline... This form of reconciliation of a number of penitents with general confession and absolution *cannot become an ordinary one and it cannot and must not be used except in cases of grave necessity*. And there remains unchanged the obligation to make an individual confession of serious sins before again having recourse to another general absolution... The exceptional use of general absolution must never lead to a lesser regard for, still less an abandonment of the ordinary form, nor must it lead to this form being considered an alternative to the normal and ordinary reconciliation through individual sacramental confession" (*Boletín Eclesiástico*, 1985, nn. 32, 33).

We presume that the priest, before imparting the general absolution has reminded the penitents of their serious obligation to