

Manila

March 25, 1992

To our beloved Ordinary,  
**HIS EMINENCE, JAIME L. CARDINAL SIN, D.D.**  
Archbishop of Manila,  
We the Editor and Staff of

**BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS**

extend  
our heartfelt greetings, the promise  
of our prayers and this small token  
of our joy in fellow-service in the  
Vineyard with  
so great a Servant of our Divine Master,  
on the occasion of his Eminence's  
**SILVER EPISCOPAL JUBILEE.**

**AD MULTOS ANNOS!**

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## St. John of the Cross (1542-1591), Priest

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Roman Carter, O.P.

*St. John of the Cross lived on this earth less than fifty years of which for twenty four he was a priest. And so we can say that roughly half his life was that of sacerdotal ministry in many and varied places and situations. We know that he preached and heard confessions, we know he had a definite and unique apostolate as a writer. Less is talked of him as an administrator, a teacher and all too little is usually said of his abilities as an artist and a craftsman. I suppose his two most priestly (and endearing) qualities were his love for the Eucharist - to be deprived of celebrating Mass during his harsh imprisonment in Toledo from December, 1566 to August, 1567 was a worse torture than the physical cruelties inflicted by his false, Calced brethren - and his tender affection for the Blessed Virgin Mary who "saved" him as a boy and as a man from death and prolonged agony.*

*First and foremost as a priest, St. John was a reformer. He was hardly ordained and had not finished his theological studies in Salamanca when at Medina for his First Mass he had resolved to seek a stricter life than that of the decadent Carmelites to whom he belonged by Solemn Profession. He thought to go to El Paular in the Province of Madrid and to become a Carthusian. A great woman, St. Teresa of Jesus, whose collaborator he became, dissuaded him. Instead with two companions he found silence, solitude, cold, penury and sheer hunger in the desert of Dureulo, a tiny hamlet on the provincial borders of*

*Avila and Salamanca. He also found apostolate and attended to the spiritual needs of his humble neighbors in a poverty as benefit of comfort as their own.*

*Aged twenty-eight he began his apostolate as novice master at Mancera and went on to Pastrana before coming first Rector of the Discalced Carmelite College at the University of Alcala. Had not his reform been so new and had not the need for nuns' spiritual direction been so great in the XVIth century, John might well have remained as an administrator and professor in the shadow and in the cloister of a great University all his days. Precisely because he was a priest, he accepted the challenge of being one of two Discalced confessors at the large Calced Monastery of La Encarnacion in Avila. There were one hundred and thirty nuns to attend to, and St. Teresa was their Prioress.*

*Wherever he went, John of the Cross was the victim of jealousy. For he was holy, and he was used by God as the instrument for making others holy. And so he suffered physical violence. He was kidnapped. He was imprisoned in Toledo. He was tortured. He was starved. He was cut off from priestly and sacramental life. And he wrote poetry. And he contemplated truth. And he prayed incessantly. And, finally, he escaped.*

*Most of the rest of his life was spent in the South of Spain, the once-Arabic domains of Andalucia. In small places and big, with more and more administrative responsibility, burdened with shallow finance, challenged by architectural needs, John wrote as never before and preached and taught with a vigor that belied his short stature and his emaciated body. After rising to the heights, he was flung to the depths to die almost alone and certainly unwanted. Yet his last days were comforted by the haunting sounds of the guitar and lulled by the Latin of the Church and the Castillian of his far off home.*

*St. John of the Cross never left Spain. But he knew a good bit of it. St. John of the Cross was never a parish priest. But he knew much about very ordinary (and some very extraordinary) laymen and laywomen. St. John of the Cross was all his religious life, from his teens till his death, a Carmelite. But he changed the meaning of the term. For to paraphrase slightly the titles of his four great works of poetry and mystical commentary: he ascended*



*Mt. Carmel by a straight path never dillydallying in fashionable laxity; he went through two Dark Nights and emerged not just illumined within but glowing with love and truth; he sang a song that through his singing become the Song of Songs of a true shepherd who continues to guide his reading flock down through the centuries. Best of all, St. John of the Cross blazed with a Flame of Love Alive and, unquestionably priestly in his manner, he imparts that light from God still.*

## Redemptoris Missio II

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John Paul II

### The Vast Horizons of the Mission *Ad Gentes*

31. The Lord Jesus sent his Apostles to every person, people and place on earth. In the Apostles the Church received a universal mission — one which knows no boundaries — which involves the communication of salvation in its integrity according to that fulness of life which Christ came to bring (cf. *Jn* 10:10). The Church was “sent by Christ to reveal and communicate the love of God to all people and nations.”<sup>1</sup>

This mission is one and undivided, having one origin and one final purpose<sup>2</sup> but within it, there are different tasks and kinds of activity. First, there is the missionary activity which we call *mission ad gentes*, in reference to the opening words of the Council’s Decree on this subject. This is one of the Church’s fundamental activities: it is essential and never-ending. The Church, in fact, “cannot withdraw from her *permanent mission of bringing the Gospel* to the multitudes — the millions and millions of men and women — who as yet do not know Christ the Redeemer of humanity. In a specific way this is the missionary work which Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to his Church.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 10.

<sup>2</sup>Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 35: AAS 81 (1989), 457.

*A complex and ever changing  
religious picture.*

32. Today we face a religious situation which is extremely varied and changing. Peoples are on the move; social and religious realities which were once clear and well-defined are today increasingly complex. We need only think of certain phenomena such as urbanization, mass migration, the flood of refugees, the de-christianization of countries with ancient Christian traditions, the increasing influence of the Gospel and its values in overwhelmingly non-christian countries, and the proliferation of messianic cults and religious sects. Religious and social upheaval makes it difficult to apply in practice certain ecclesial distinctions and categories to which we have become accustomed. Even before the Council it was said that some Christian cities and countries had become "mission territories;" the situation has certainly not improved in the years since then.

On the other hand, missionary work has been very fruitful throughout the world, so that there are now well-established Churches, sometimes so sound and mature that they are able to provide for the needs of their own communities and even send personnel to evangelize in other Churches and territories. This is in contrast to some traditionally Christian areas which are in need of re-evangelization. As a result, some are questioning whether it is still appropriate to speak of *specific missionary activity or specifically* "missionary" areas, or whether we should speak instead of a *single missionary* situation, with one single mission, the same everywhere. The difficulty of relating this complex and changing reality to the mandate of evangelization is apparent in the "language of mission." For example, there is a certain hesitation to use the terms "missions" and "missionaries," which are considered obsolete and as having negative historical connotations. People prefer to use instead the noun "mission" in the singular and the adjective "missionary" to describe all the Church's activities.

This uneasiness denotes a real change, one which has certain positive aspects. The so-called return or "repatriation" of the missions into the Church's mission, the insertion of *missiology* into *ecclesiology*, and the integration of both areas into the Trinitarian plan of salvation, have given a fresh impetus to

missionary activity itself, which is not considered a marginal task for the Church but is situated at the center of her life, as a fundamental commitment of the whole People of God. Nevertheless, care must be taken to avoid the risk of putting very different situations on the same level and of reducing, or even eliminating, the Church's mission and missionaries *ad gentes*. To say that the whole Church is missionary does not preclude the existence of a specific mission *ad gentes*, just as saying that all Catholics must be missionaries not only does not exclude, but actually requires that there be persons who have a specific vocation to be "life-long missionaries *ad gentes*."

*Mission ad gentes retains its value.*

33. The fact that there is a diversity of activities in the Church's one mission is not intrinsic to that mission, but arises from the variety of circumstances in which that mission is carried out.<sup>3</sup> Looking at today's world from the viewpoint of evangelization, we can distinguish three situations.

First, there is the situation which the Church's missionary activity addresses: peoples, groups and socio-cultural contexts in which Christ and his Gospel are not known, or which lack Christian communities sufficiently mature to be able to incarnate the faith in their own environment and proclaim it to other groups. This is mission *ad gentes* in the proper sense of the term."<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, there are Christian communities with adequate and solid ecclesial structures. They are fervent in their faith and in Christian living. They bear witness to the Gospel in their surroundings and have a sense of commitment to the universal mission. In these communities the Church carries out her activity and pastoral care.

Thirdly, there is an intermediate situation, particularly in countries with ancient Christian roots, and occasionally in the younger Churches as well, where entire groups of the baptized

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<sup>3</sup>Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 6.

<sup>4</sup>Cf. *ibid.*

have lost a living sense of the faith, or even no longer consider themselves members of the Church, and live a life far removed from Christ and his Gospel. In this case what is needed is a "new evangelization" or a "re-evangelization."

34. Missionary activity proper, namely the mission *ad gentes*, is directed to "peoples or groups who not yet believe in Christ," "who are far from Christ," in whom the Church "has not yet taken root"<sup>5</sup> and whose culture has not yet been influenced by the Gospel.<sup>6</sup> It is distinct from other ecclesial activities inasmuch as it is addressed to groups and settings which are non-Christian because the preaching of the Gospel and the presence of the Church are either absent or insufficient. It can thus be characterized as the work of proclaiming Christ and his Gospel, building up the local Church and promoting the values of the Kingdom. The specific nature of this mission *ad gentes* consists in its being addressed to "non-Christians." It is therefore necessary to ensure that this specifically "missionary work that Jesus entrusted and still entrusts each day to his Church"<sup>7</sup> does not become an indistinguishable part of the overall mission of the whole People of God and as a result become neglected or forgotten.

On the other hand, the boundaries between *pastoral care of the faithful*, *new evangelization* and *specific missionary activity* are not clearly definable, and it is unthinkable to create barriers between them or to put them into water-tight compartments. Nevertheless, there must be no lessening of the impetus to preach the Gospel and to establish new Churches among peoples or communities where they do not yet exist, for this is the first task of the Church, which has been sent forth to all peoples and to the very ends of the earth. Without the mission *ad gentes*, the Church's very missionary dimensions would be deprived of its essential meaning and of the very activity that exemplifies it.

Also to be noted is the real and growing *interdependence* which exists between these various saving activities of the Church.

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 6, 23, 27.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 18-20: *loc. cit.*, 17-19.

<sup>7</sup>Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*, 35: *loc. cit.*, 457.

Each of them influences, stimulates and assists the others. The missionary thrust fosters exchanges between the Churches and directs them towards the larger world, with positive influences in every direction. The Churches in traditionally Christian countries, for example, involved as they are in the challenging task of new evangelization, are coming to understand more clearly that they cannot be missionaries to non-Christians in other countries and continents unless they are seriously concerned about the non-Christians at home. Hence missionary activity *ad intra* is a credible sign and a stimulus for missionary activity *ad extra*, and vice versa.

*To all peoples,  
in spite of difficulties*

35. The mission *ad gentes* faces an enormous task, which is in no way disappearing. Indeed, both from the numerical standpoint of demographic increase and from the socio-cultural standpoint of the appearance of new relationships, contacts and changing situations, the mission seems destined to have ever wider horizons. The task of proclaiming Jesus Christ to all peoples appears to be immense and out of all proportion to the Church's human resources.

*The difficulties* seem insurmountable and could easily lead to discouragement, if it were a question of a merely human enterprise. In certain countries missionaries are refused entry. In others, not only is evangelization forbidden but conversion as well, and even Christian worship. Elsewhere the obstacles are of a cultural nature: passing on the Gospel message seems irrelevant or incomprehensible, and conversion is seen as a rejection of one's own people and culture.

36. Nor are *difficulties* lacking *within* the People of God; indeed these difficulties are the most painful of all. As the first of these difficulties Pope Paul VI pointed to "the lack of fervour (which) is all the more serious because it comes from within. It is manifested in fatigue, disenchantment, compromise, lack of interest and above all lack of joy and hope."<sup>8</sup> Other great obstacles to

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<sup>8</sup>Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80: *loc. cit.*, 73.

the Church's missionary work include past and present divisions among Christians,<sup>9</sup> de-christianization within Christian countries, the decrease of vocations to the apostolate, and the counter-witness of believers and Christian communities failing to follow the model of Christ in their lives. But one of the most serious reasons for the lack of interest in the missionary task is a widespread indifferentism, which, sad to say, is found also among Christians. It is based on incorrect theological perspectives and is characterised by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that "one religion is as good as another." We can add, using the words of Pope Paul VI, that there are also certain "excuses which would impede evangelization. The most insidious of these excuses are certainly the ones which people claim to find support for in such and such a teaching of the Council."<sup>10</sup>

In this regard, I earnestly ask theologians and professional Christian journalists to intensify the service they render to the Church's mission in order to discover the deep meaning of their work, along the sure path of "thinking with the Church" (*sentire cum Ecclesia*).

Internal and external difficulties must not make us pessimistic or inactive. What counts, here as in every area of Christian life, is the confidence that comes from faith, from the certainty that it is not we who are the principal agents of the Church's mission, but Jesus Christ and his Spirit. We are only co-workers, and when we have done all that we can, we must say: "We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty" (*Lk 17:10*).

### *Parameters of the Church's mission ad gentes.*

37. By virtue of Christ's universal mandate, the mission *ad gentes* knows no boundaries. Still, it is possible to determine certain parameters within which that mission is exercised, in order to gain a real grasp of the situation.

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<sup>9</sup>Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 6.

<sup>10</sup>Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 80: *loc. cit.*, 73.

(a) *Territorial limits.* Missionary activity has normally been defined in terms of specific territories. The Second Vatican Council acknowledged the territorial dimension of the *mission ad gentes*,<sup>11</sup> a dimension which even today remains important for determining responsibilities, competencies and the geographical limits of missionary activity. Certainly, a universal mission implies a universal perspective. Indeed, the Church refuses to allow her missionary presence to be hindered by geographical boundaries or political barriers. But it is also true that missionary activity *ad gentes*, being different from the pastoral care of the faithful and the new evangelization of the non-practising, is exercised within well-defined territories and groups of people.

The growth in the number of new Churches in recent times should not deceive us. Within the territories entrusted to these Churches — particularly in Asia, but also in Africa, Latin America and Oceania — there remain vast regions still to be evangelized. In many nations entire peoples and cultural areas of great importance have not yet been reached by the proclamation of the Gospel and the presence of the local Church.<sup>12</sup> Even in traditionally Christian countries there are regions that are under the special structures of the *mission ad gentes*, with groups and areas not yet evangelized. Thus, in these countries too there is a need not only for a new evangelization, but also, in some cases, for an initial evangelization.<sup>13</sup>

Situations are not however the same everywhere. While acknowledging that statements about the missionary responsibility of the Church are not credible unless they are backed up by a serious commitment to a new evangelization in the traditionally Christian countries, it does not seem justified to regard as identical the situation of a people which has never known Jesus Christ and that of a people which has known him, accepted him and then rejected him, while continuing to live in a culture which in large part has absorbed Gospel principles and values. These are two basically different situations with regard to the faith.

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<sup>11</sup>Cf. Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 6.

<sup>12</sup>Cf. *ibid.*, 20.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Address to the members of the Symposium of the Council of the European Episcopal Conferences, 11 October 1985: AAS 78 (1986), 178-189.



Thus the criterion of geography, although somewhat imprecise and always provisional, is still a valid indicator of the frontiers towards which missionary activity must be directed. There are countries and geographical and cultural areas which lack indigenous Christian communities. In other places, these communities are so small as not to be a clear sign of a Christian presence; or they lack the dynamism to evangelize their societies, or belong to a minority population not integrated into the dominant culture of the nation. Particularly in Asia, towards which the Church's mission *ad gentes* ought to be chiefly directed, Christians are a small minority, even though sometimes there are significant numbers of converts and outstanding examples of Christian presence.

(b) *New worlds and new social phenomena.* The rapid and profound transformations which characterize today's world, especially in the southern hemisphere, are having a powerful effect on the overall missionary picture. Where before there were stable human and social situations, today everything is in flux. One thinks, for example, of urbanization and the massive growth of cities especially where demographic pressure is greatest. In not a few countries, over half the population already lives in a few "megapolises," where human problems are often aggravated by the feeling of anonymity experienced by masses of people.

In the modern age, missionary activity has been carried out especially in isolated regions which are far from centres of civilization and which are hard to penetrate because of difficulties of communication, language or climate. Today the image of mission *ad gentes* is perhaps changing: efforts should be concentrated on the big cities, where new customs and styles of living arise together with new forms of culture and communication, which then influence the wider population. It is true that the "option for the neediest" means that we should not overlook the most abandoned and isolated human groups, but it is also true that individuals or small groups cannot be evangelized if we neglect the centres where a new humanity, so to speak, is emerging, and where new models of development are taking shape. The future of the younger nations is being shaped in the cities.

Speaking of the future, we cannot forget the young, who in many countries comprise more than half the population. How do

we bring the message of Christ to non-Christian young people who represent the future of entire continents. Clearly, the ordinary means of pastoral work are not sufficient: what are needed are associations, institutions, special centres and groups, and cultural and social initiatives for young people. This is a field where modern ecclesial movements have ample room for involvement.

Among the great changes taking place in the contemporary world, migration has produced a new phenomenon: non-Christians are becoming very numerous in traditionally Christian countries, creating fresh opportunities for contacts and cultural exchanges, and calling the Church to hospitality, dialogue, assistance and, in a word, fraternity. Among migrants, refugees occupy a very special place and deserve the greatest attention. Today, there are many millions of refugees in the world and their number is constantly increasing. They have fled from conditions of political oppression and inhuman misery, from famine and drought of catastrophic proportions. The Church must make them part of her overall apostolic concern.

Finally, we may mention the situations of poverty — often on an intolerable scale — which have been created in not a few countries, and which are often the cause of mass migration. The community of believers in Christ is challenged by these inhuman situations: the proclamation of Christ and the Kingdom of God must become the means for restoring the human dignity of these people.

(c) *Cultural sectors: the modern equivalents of the Areopagus.* After preaching in a number of places, Saint Paul arrived in Athens, where he went to the Areopagus and proclaimed the Gospel in language appropriate to and understandable in those surroundings (cf. Ac 17:22-31). At that time the Areopagus represented the cultural centre of the learned people of Athens, and today it can be taken as a symbol of the new sectors in which the Gospel must be proclaimed.

The first Areopagus of the modern age is the world of communications, which is unifying humanity and turning it into what is known as a "global village." The means of social communication have become so important as to be for many the chief means of

information and education, of guidance and inspiration in their behavior as individuals, families and within society at large. In particular, the younger generation is growing up in a world conditioned by the mass media. To some degree perhaps this Areopagus has been neglected. Generally, preference has been given to other means of preaching the Gospel and of Christian education, while the mass media are left to the initiative of individuals or small groups and enter into pastoral planning only in a secondary way. Involvement in the mass media are left to the initiative of individuals or small groups and enter into pastoral planning only in a secondary way. Involvement in the mass media, however, is not meant merely to strengthen the preaching of the Gospel. There is a deeper reality involved here: since the very evangelization of modern culture depends to a great extent on the influence of the media, it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the "new culture" created by modern communications. This is a complex issue, since the "new culture" originates not just from whatever content is eventually expressed, but from the very fact that there exist new ways of communicating, with new languages, new techniques and a new psychology. Pope Paul VI said that "the split between the Gospel and culture is undoubtedly the tragedy of our time,"<sup>14</sup> and the field of communications fully confirms this judgment.

There are many other forms of the "Areopagus" in the modern world towards which the Church's missionary activity ought to be directed; for example, commitment to peace, development and the liberation of peoples; the rights of individuals and peoples, especially those of minorities; the advancement of women and children; safeguarding the created world. These too are areas which need to be illuminated with the light of the Gospel.

We must also mention the immense "Areopagus" of culture, scientific research, and international relations which promote dialogue and open up new possibilities. We would do well to be attentive to these modern areas of activity and to be involved in

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<sup>14</sup>Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 20: *loc. cit.*, 19.

them. People sense that they are as it were travelling together across life's sea, and that they are called to ever greater unity and solidarity. Solutions to pressing problems must be studied, discussed and worked out with the involvement of all. That is why international organizations and meetings are proving increasingly important in many sectors of human life, from culture to politics, from the economy to research. Christians who live and work in this international sphere must always remember their duty to bear witness to the Gospel.

38. Our times are both momentous and fascinating. While on the one hand people seem to be pursuing material prosperity and to be sinking ever deeper into consumerism and materialism, on the other hand we are witnessing a desperate search for meaning, the need for an inner life, and a desire to learn new forms and methods of meditation and prayer. Not only in cultures with strong religious elements, but also in secularized societies, the spiritual dimension of life is being sought after as an antidote to dehumanization. This phenomenon — the so-called "religious revival" — is not without ambiguity, but it also represents an opportunity. The Church has an immense spiritual patrimony to offer mankind, a heritage in Christ, who called himself "the way, and the truth, and the life" (*Jn* 14:6): it is the Christian path to meeting God, to prayer, to asceticism, and to the search for life's meaning. Here too there is an "Areopagus" to be evangelized.

*Fidelity to Christ  
and the promotion of human freedom*

39. All forms of missionary activity are marked by an awareness that one is furthering human freedom by proclaiming Jesus Christ. The Church must be faithful to Christ, whose Body she is, and whose mission she continues. She must necessarily "go to the same road that Christ went — namely a road of poverty, obedience, service and self-sacrifice even unto death, from which he emerged a victor through his Resurrection."<sup>15</sup> The Church is thus obliged to do everything possible to carry out her mission in the world and to reach all peoples. And she has the right to do

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<sup>15</sup>Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church *Ad Gentes*, 5; cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

this, a right given her by God for the accomplishment of his plan. Religious freedom, which is still at times limited or restricted, remains the premise guarantee of all the freedoms that ensure the common good of individuals and peoples. It is to be hoped that authentic religious freedom will be granted to all people everywhere. The Church strives for this in all countries, especially in those with a Catholic majority, where she has greater influence. But it is not a question of the religion of the majority or the minority, but an inalienable right of each and every human person.

On her part, the Church addresses people with full respect for their freedom.<sup>16</sup> Her mission does not restrict freedom but rather promotes it. *The Church proposes; she imposes nothing.* She respects individuals and cultures, and she honors the sanctuary of conscience. To those who for various reasons oppose missionary activity, the Church repeats: *Open the doors to Christ!*

Here I wish to address all the particular Churches, both young and old. The world is steadily growing more united, and the Gospel spirit must lead us to overcome cultural and nationalistic barriers, avoiding all isolationism. Pope Benedict XV already cautioned the missionaries of his time lest they "forget their proper dignity and think more of their earthly homeland than of their heavenly one."<sup>17</sup> This same advice is valid today for the particular Churches: Open the doors to missionaries, for "each individual Church that would voluntarily cut itself off from the universal Church would lose its relationship to God's plan and would be impoverished in its ecclesial mission."<sup>18</sup>

*Directing attention towards  
the South and the East/*

40. Today missionary activity still represents the greatest challenge for the Church. As the end of the second Millennium of

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<sup>16</sup>Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Declaration on Religious Freedom *Dignitatis Humanae*, 3-4; Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 79-80: loc. cit., 71-75; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptor Hominis*, 12: loc. cit., 278-281.

<sup>17</sup>Apostolic Letter *Maximum Illud*: loc. cit., 446.

<sup>18</sup>Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 62: loc. cit., 52.

the Redemption draws near, it is clear that the peoples which have not yet received an initial proclamation of Christ constitute the majority of mankind. The result of missionary activity in the modern times are certainly positive. The Church has been established on every continent; indeed today the majority of believers and particular Churches is to found no longer in Europe but on the continents which missionaries have opened up to the faith.

The fact remains however that the "ends of the earth" to which the Gospel must be brought are growing even more distant. Tertullian's saying that the Gospel has been proclaimed to all the earth and to all people,<sup>19</sup> is still very far from being a reality. The mission *ad gentes* is still in its infancy. New peoples appear on the world scene, and they too have a right to receive the proclamation of salvation. Population growth in non-Christian countries of the South and the East is constantly increasing the number of people who remain unaware of Christ's Redemption.

We need therefore to direct our attention towards those geographical areas and cultural setting which still remain uninfluenced by the Gospel. All who believe in Christ should feel, as an integral part of their faith, an apostolic concern to pass on to others its light and joy. This concern must become as it were a hunger and thirst to make the Lord known, given the vastness of the non-Christian world.

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<sup>19</sup>Cf. *De praescriptione haereticorum*, XX: CCL I, 201F.

## May Christ's Light Continue to Shine on Your Vocations

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John Paul II

### ***Feast of Presentation: Pray for vocation to the consecrated life***

*On Sunday, 2 February, the religious of Rome were invited to celebrate the feast of the Presentation of the Lord with the Holy Father in St. Peter's Basilica. Because of the many generalates and academic institutes in Rome, the religious gathered in the Vatican that day truly represented the Church's universality.*

*During the homily the Pope spoke of the role of religious and asked for their participation in preparations for the next Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, scheduled for 1994, which will deal with the consecrated life. Repeating the theme of the 500th anniversary of the evangelization of America, the Holy Father recalled the role of religious missionary activity in the "new world". The Pope also had a special word of gratitude for the contemplatives for their life of prayer and penance, thanking them especially for their support of the recent Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops. The following is a translation of the Pope's homily.*

1. "Every first-born male shall be consecrated to the Lord"(Lk 2:23; cf. Ezr 13:2).

The Church respects the tempo of biblical events. Although the Christmas season was brought to a close with the Epiphany, today's feast recalls what took place 40 days after the Redeemer's

birth. On that day, following the Law of Moses, the family saw to the *presentation of the new born in the temple*: "Every first-born male shall be consecrated to the Lord" (Lk 2:23). Following the prescription of the ancient Law, Mary and Joseph "brought up Jesus to Jerusalem so that he could be presented to the Lord" (Lk 2:22).

This event thematically belongs to Christmas. In no other event like today's does the truth about the *messianic future of the Child born in Bethlehem enter into the reality of the birth of the Son God*. This birth took place through the power of the Holy Spirit who, through the words of the elderly Simeon, reveals what Jesus' future will hold: He "is destined to be the downfall and the rise of the many Israel, a sign that will be opposed" (Lk 2:34). It will be a sorrowful opposition; it will be a martyrdom: the martyrdom of the cross which will deeply affect *the Mother, who will herself "be pierced by a sword"* (Lk 2:35).

2. Who is this First-born Son whom the Temple of Jerusalem receives 40 days after his birth?

The liturgy replies in the words of the prophet Malachi: he is "the Lord whom you seek; the *angel of the covenant*, whom you desire" (3:1).

"Angel" means "messenger". The one whom Joseph and Mary present in the temple is not the messenger of the covenant. He himself is *the new and eternal covenant*. He is "a merciful and faithful high priest before God on their behalf, to expiate the sins of the people" (Heb 2:17). With his priesthood he came "to help... the children of Abraham" according to the spirit, as the letters of the Hebrews proclaims (2:16). In fact, Abraham has become "the father of all those who believe" (cf. Rom 4:11).

With Jesus "*the royal priesthood*" enters into the temple of Jerusalem (1 Pt 2:9). He is the "king of glory" (cf. Ps 24[23]:8), before whom the "the ancient portals" reach up (cf. ibid, 9), the portals which are symbolic of the temple of Jerusalem. Christ penetrates this symbol to its depths, and in himself manifests "God's dwelling with the human race" (Rv 21:3), making us a kingdom of priests" (Rv 5:10) for God, his Father.



3. "Every first-born male shall be consecrated to the Lord:" the first-born of Mary of Nazareth and, at the same time, "*the first-born of all creation*" (cf. Col 1:15): the Son consubstantial with the Father. Behold, the day has come for his "consecration" to God in the human condition, according to Israel's "consecration," however, will be revealed gradually.

The readings from today's liturgy are a proclamation of this event. They are also an *expression* of that particular evangelical "*primogeniture*" in which you participate among all the sons and daughters of divine election. Dear *brothers and sisters*, you are called to dedicate your life to God in the way Jesus Christ said. *Your consecration*, which corresponds to the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience, is "the better portion" which the Master speaks about (cf. Lk 10:42). It is as though we were to find in it the spiritual "*primogeniture*" of the *new covenant*, which contains the full meaning of being "consecrated to the Lord," which was the prerogative of the first-born sons according to the ancient law.

Christ revealed the contents of this consecration through the Gospel of his own life. Today, the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, we all want to return to this Gospel; you, the members of the religious orders and congregations who live in Rome, especially want to do so. In spiritual communion with you, all the world's religious want to do so, all those who are consecrated in the same way as the one who is the Master and the Bridegroom of your vocation.

4. In this year, 1992, the celebration of the fifth centenary of the evangelization of America invites us to give special thanks for the life and missionary work of countless religious who spent their best energy to help open "the ancient doors" of those peoples so that "the King of glory" could enter, transforming those lands into sanctuaries of his merciful, faithful presence. Such missionary activity could never have been accomplished if their consecration to God had not been like an interior blazing fire which revealed the nearness of the "First-born of creation" as a sign of hope for all peoples! *That fire which is enkindled by divine love*, which is fueled by contemplating the things of God, and which is expressed in the joyous proclamation of the Lord and, therefore,

in sacrificial service for our brothers and sisters, as their dignity requires: that holy fire *is the zeal which we need so greatly for the new evangelization.*

5. Today, in lighting these candles which signify the light of Christ, we are also beginning preparations for the *next Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, which, as we know, will deal with the consecrated life and its involvement in the Church and world. On the threshold of the year 2000, then, it will deal with your life, your consecration, your way of participating in evangelization and, as a consequence, the Church's missionary activity. Support the preparations for it with your prayers! Actively participate in the consultations addressed to you.

The successors of the Apostles will meet to discuss your life, the contribution which your founders and foundresses and their respective spiritual families have made to the Church's mission, and are making now. They want to understand in all its breadth and depth the plan of the Lord who sacrifices, enriches and also guide his people through the gifts and charisms of the communities of consecrated life and societies of apostolic life. The bishops want to help you to be Gospel leaven and evangelizers of the cultures of the third millennium and the social ordering of peoples.

6. With special affection I now address the members of the monasteries and all the *communities of the contemplative life*. Dear brothers and sisters, from my heart I thank you for having accompanied in your prayer and penance the work of recent Special Assembly for Europe of the Synod of Bishops, generously responding to the invitation in that regard which I made to you in Fatima on 13 May last year.

*Persevere in raising you hymn of praise* in the name of the whole Church to the Angel of the Covenant, the merciful and faithful High Priest! *Through your penance continue to collaborate* in the work of the one who purifies his sons and daughters so that they can offer themselves to the Lord as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God (Rom 12:1) for the praise of his glory (Eph 1:12).

In a special way I entrust to your *prayerful presence*, totally consecrated to the contemplation of the divine mystery, the

Church's missionary projects at the dawn of the Third Christian Millennium.

7. "My eyes have witnessed your saving deed" (*Lk* 2:30). May today's feast become for you, dear brothers and sisters, *a day of thanksgiving*. With Simeon thank the Father for what your "eyes have witnessed;" for the "saving deed" which you participate in and serve; for "the light," *the light of your particular vocation* which penetrated your hearts.

Give thanks! Give thanks together with me!

Thanking him, *pray intensely* that the saving "light" may shine on the paths of your life. May it enlighten you and others through you. May your eyes always and everywhere see in this divine light *God's saving will*. Last of all, pray – let us all pray "with loud cries" (cf. *Heb* 5:7) - that the new generations all over the earth, in every people and nation, may experience the joy of *meeting Christ's light*. Let us pray for vocations to the consecrated life so that there may be more and more people on earth who can say with Simeon: "My eyes have witnessed your saving deed."

## On Priestly Formation

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*Leonardo Z. Legaspi, D.D.*

*(Keynote Address delivered by His Grace, the Most Rev. Leonardo Z. Legaspi, O.P., D.D., Archbishop of Caceres, during the National Convention of Seminary Formators, at the St. Gregory the Great Seminary, Sipi, Daraga, Albay, on October 22, 1991 at 8:30 a.m.)*

### Introduction

Since the Second Vatican Council much thought and effort has been expended searching for avenues to improve priestly formation. This concern is grounded on the conviction expressed by the same Council that "the desired renewal of the Church depends in great part upon a priestly ministry animated by the spirit of Christ" (OT, n. 1). Hence the critical importance of priestly formation. The constant quest will always be for priests for our time ! But the crucial question is always "What kind of priestly formation, given the complex and rapidly changing culture of today?" That was the question placed before the fathers of the Eighth Synod of Bishops. October 1990. And for one full month 238 fathers were involved in what the Holy Father called: "the actualization and illustration of the collegial nature of the episcopate contributing to the unity of the Church."

My task in this conference is to provide an overview of some of the main ideas and proposals made by the synod fathers. Since most of the fathers followed the outline of the working document,

*the Instrumentum Laboris*, these ideas will be presented under the same headings. Our Seminar however was not convened merely to the review the salient issues of the 8th Synod. That is in itself a worthwhile objective without doubt. We all have however, an ulterior objective: to discern together *how these synodal ideas fit in with the Asian and Philippine setting, being and acting*. For this reason, the treatment of the synodal issues will, whenever feasible, be followed by pertinent reflections of FABC and PCP II. A brief evaluation will conclude this sharing.

### **From Open to Closed Seminaries**

*A consistent lesson of the history of priestly formation is:*

*"Though priestly life and spirituality has remained essentially the same over the centuries, it has taken various forms. Styles of priestly formation have changed. This has been influenced by changing ecclesiastical climate, the challenges of the time, as well as special divine charisms."* (cf. *Priests of the Future*, Rev. Michael Mulvey (ed) New City Press, 1990, Priestly Formation in the History of the Church, E. Pepe, p.8).

Take the case of the French revolution. It overturned the traditional life of the Church, bringing about a profound transformation in the life of the clergy. Pius IX, a prisoner in Rome, was a living symbol of the church at that time. The Church was forced into a defensive withdrawal in order to preserve at the least the purity of the faith. In this social and cultural atmosphere the dialogue between churchmen and the new culture became more difficult, as witnessed by the *Syllabus* of Pius IX and the decree *Lamentabili* of Pius IX.

The change in the seminary was immediate. From the original open stance it re-organized into a closed one. "In order to protect the candidates for priesthood from the negative influences of the world, the emerging seminary distanced itself from the world. Separation from urban life often became geographical as well. In remote surroundings the students came to be formed in strict discipline which did not always value personal initiative, in a neo-scholastic theology which found dialogue with modern culture difficult, and in a religion which was sincere but

often individualistic. Seminaries entered a period of stagnation while things around them changed rapidly." (cf. F. Gualdrini, *Aspiti della Teologia del Sacerdocio dopo il Concilio*, Citta Nuova Editrice, Roma, 1974, p. 231).

Despite these limitations, the seminaries formed a considerable number of well-prepared priests, even saints, v. gr. St. John Bosco. But these seminaries were limited by a particular perspective: a pastoral style suited more to small rural parishes where, until the last World War, the greater part of the population lived as farmers. With industrialization, urbanization, and secularism, priestly formation finds itself facing new challenges. Pius XII, already in his exhortation to the clergy, *Menti Nostrae*, (1951) sensed the need to chart a new path for seminaries. He called them to read the signs of times. Unfortunately his document was accepted more of its spiritual message than for its call for a complete updating. This was unfortunate.

## Vatican Council II

By the time Vatican II was convened, the seminary crisis had already come to full term. It was not just an occasional difficulty here and there; there were problems everywhere. The principal document to address itself with the formation of priests at this period is *Optatam Totius* (1965). When viewed with the other Vatican II documents, *Optatam Totius* allows us to see the new orientative principles on the renewal of priestly formation.

By concentrating on the two great issues of *unity* and *mission* the ecclesiological renewal of Vatican II dramatically changed the image of the priest and of priestly formation as well. Alongside the classic reference to Christ, the Good Shepherd (OT, n. 4), through whom the priest acts in *persona Christi*, Vatican II emphasized two other essential points: Church unity and mission to the world. The priesthood, as the Council saw it, can no longer viewed in an individual way. It must be recognized as clearly communitarian and ecclesial, important dimensions that were part of priestly ministry in the early centuries. (An example is exhortation of St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Ephesians* ch. 4, 1-2). The principal agent of pastoral work is no longer only an individual but a community: it is the diocesan priesthood

which through its unity makes the bishop present in each and every community and in the universal church (cf. Pepe, E., *Priestly Formation*. . . p. 19).

For this reason the priests are no longer seen as isolated but rather as profoundly united with the laity with whom they share the royal priesthood and the church's mission to the world. Mission then becomes the third important features of the priesthood according to Vatican II. If the Church has a mission to the world, this mission is especially true for priests. *Optatam Totius* brings this out by insisting on dialogue and mission.

*Mystery*, *unity*, and *mission* are the central themes for ministry and hence for priestly formation which have emerged from the Second Vatican Council.

### The 8th Synod of Bishops

A quarter of a century after Vatican II, we are still searching for a contemporary style of priestly formation that will "produce for the Church priests who aspire to the lofty heights of their mission in circumstance that are demanding but full of potential for the years ahead." (cf. Introduction to the *Lineamenta* of the 8th Synod of Bishops). An excellent document to use as a basis of our review of the 8th Synod of Bishops is the *Instrumentum Laboris*, the equivalent of a working document for the synod fathers. It consists of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion.

The *first* chapter, "The Circumstance of the Present Day," describes in broad strokes the complex society in which the priests and those preparing for priesthood find themselves. This is the basis for taking up the formation of priests.

The *second* chapter, "The Identity and Mission of the Priest in the Church," includes the discussion of the various characteristics of the priesthood, the requirement of a specific, total and complete priestly spirituality.

The *third* chapter, "Formation for Priesthood," begins with the preliminary stage of pastoral activity on the promotion of vocations. This is followed by a listing of the criteria of discern-

Opinions vary about the process used by the Synod. Narrow and cumbersome for some, time-tested for others. Two considerations, I think, are in order: one, that the product that can be expected realistically from the Synod is pretty much *limited*, given the diversity of participants, and the time frame of the process. The real benefit lies in the discussion itself. Second, we were in the Synod to say what we wanted to say on the subject, and the Holy Father was there to listen. And he listened.

Let us go over some of the main ideas taken up. As stated at the beginning, we will follow the outline of the *Instrumentum Laboris*. This is practical because during the discussion the fathers followed the outline of the working document.

### **Circumstances of the Present Day**

There was unanimity on the main difficulty in the formation of priests today: the candidates come from a world and culture caught up in rapid changes. Several bishops spoke about the increasing secularization of our world and the resulting loss of divine faith and belief in anything spiritual and supernatural. The increase in individualism, subjectivism and relativism makes it harder for young men to make a life-long commitment to the priesthood and celibacy. The breakdown of the traditional family, government control of education, and the negative influence of mass media were also mentioned as obstacles. One Bishop from Latin America described this staged the "post-modern" stage.

Probably the most potent element that influences vocations to the priesthood is *cultural*. People do not understand an *authority* which is not democratic, but comes from God; they do not understand a *word* which derives its value not from the demonstrations or the competence of who is speaking, but from the fact that it speaks *in the name of Christ* and the *Church*; the sacraments are judged more by their psychological effects than within a theological vision; the *pastoral management* derives from the mission and not from leadership qualities; the ministry of reconciliation of the priest is no longer understood since modern culture is progressively losing the notion of sin. Ultimately then it is a question of a crisis of faith.



This is what Cardinal Ratzinger brought up in this connection. There is a theological reason for the sharp decline in vocations and for the departure of many priests. Admitting that there is a crisis in the priesthood, Cardinal Ratzinger traced the source of this crisis to a false hermeneutics which is widely accepted in the Church, i.e., to a false interpretation or reading of the New Testament. He said that an uncritical acceptance of Protestant exegesis, based on the false assumptions of the 16th Century reformers, has contributed to the crisis in the priesthood. Positing a fundamental opposition between Law and Gospel, the reformers therefore regarded sacrifice and priesthood as part of the Old law which was rejected by Jesus. So for them there is no place in the New Law, for sacrifice and priests - the religion of Jesus includes only preaching the Word of God and accepting it in faith. This view, according to Cardinal Ratzinger, has wrecked havoc with priests in the Catholic Church. It has ruined their sense of identity.

The discussion on the situation of shortage of priests was fortunately placed in proper perspective by Cardinal (then Archbishop) Laghi. He reported that "the development of the growth of vocations in the last 10 years has shown: an arduous recovery in countries of "mature Catholicism," that is the greater part of Europe, North America and Australia; a constant increase in countries of "emerging Catholicism," as in Africa and Southern Asia." (cf. *Actual Situation of Vocations*, presented by the Synod, October 20, 1990) He also noted that "when there is a low standard of living, the increase in vocations is great; while the pastoral load is very heavy for priests, it is also great in those parishes which have become 'living communities' of active ministry." (Ibid) This last factor fits the description of the situation of many of our Asian Churches. In many of our countries in Asia there is clearly an "imbalance between rapid growth of the Catholic population and the modest supply of priests." (cf. Cajilig, SOR II Q. 14Ap. 12). It is the shared perception of many Asian Bishops that whatever efforts would be made in perhaps most Asian countries in order to promote vocations, they will never meet the grave shortage of priests!

The *Statement on the Priests for the 21st Century*, indicated this anxiety: "We are deeply disturbed by the present situation

in which for large number of Catholics the celebration of the central mystery of our faith is a rarity. Energetic efforts at vocation promotion have failed to alleviate the situation. It seems to us that a change in the structure of ministry is needed." (cf. King, *Symposium*, pp. 11-12).

The discussion on the shortage of priests occasioned the emergence of a sensitive issue: the ordination of mature married men (*virii probati*) in exceptional circumstances. The issue prompted the issuance of a declaration by the Synod President on October 18, 1990, followed by another set of declaration by the Committee on Information in the Synodal Bulletin n. 32. Incidentally the idea of ordaining '*virii probati*' in exceptional circumstance was already discussed by the FABC'S APMC, 1977, conclusion n. 105.

Unlike in many parts of the world, the Philippines is considered to be a fertile ground for vocations. The nature of the problem related to the pastoral work on vocation is more effective promotion. Hence PCP II, in its Acts and Resolutions, (Title XII, Sec. 1, nos. 1-3) states: "A vocation committee should be created in every parish to promote priestly and religious vocations, serve as a link between God's people and the seminary, monitor the seminarians' progress and help them persevere in their vocation. The Episcopal Commission on Seminaries, with the assistance of the directors of vocations, must put up a common national vocation program covering recruitment, formation, and follow-up evaluation. Vocational awareness should be a regular part of teaching and preaching and of instruction of all Catholics, especially in Catholic Schools." A chronic situation was also addressed by PCP II -the migrating priests- those going abroad and to Manila. The bishops are asked to work out a way effectively meeting this problem.

## **Identity and Mission of Priests**

The first and recurrent theme was priestly identity. Over and over again the bishops made the point that the priest has to be clear about who he is and what he is for. Our ability to impart this clearly is an absolutely essential task of priestly formation.

The Synodal discussion on this important aspect of priestly formation revolves around two important considerations. The *first* is the acceptance of the shift of emphasis in Vatican II from the sacral and cultic model of ministry to a *more* presbyteral, or ministerial model. The key aspect of presbyteral ministry flows from the priest's leadership role within the Christian community. The sacramental functions then are in service of building up and preserving the Church in unity and love. It is this concern for the total welfare of the community which constitutes the heart of priestly ministry. The *second* consideration is the various attempts of the synodal fathers to restate this Vatican II doctrinal orientation in a more precise and contemporary description.

The identity of a priest, says Cardinal Cordeiro should be found in Christ. The priest must find and understand his identity with Christ in the same that Christ manifested His identity with the Father in the love of the Spirit. So the integral theological vision of the priest is seen in the context of the trinitarian mystery. The priesthood is a gift, a gratuitous calling. It is a call to conform oneself to the Son, the Word Incarnate, the Good Shepherd, whose mission is continued in the world by the Church He instituted. By participating in the triple function of Christ in virtue of the sacrament of orders, the priest is able to act in *persona Christi* always animated by a profound pastoral charity which leads him to his sanctification.

An ecclesiological dimension is added to this. The salvific mission of Christ is continued and lived by the priest in communion with and for the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ and for the good of humanity. The means given by Christ for such purpose are doctrine, faith, sacraments, government. The priest then is not a simple functionary nor a delegate of the human community. He is not a solitary figure, but one inserted into the mystery-communion of the Church. Through the Church the priest is equipped to perform functions through the appropriate sacraments.

I am not altogether sure that this description of the priestly identity will alleviate the doubts of many priests or not. But an interesting question probably is: "Why this crisis of identity

continues to persist even after the clear re-orientation of Vatican II on the role of the priests?" The reason, or one of the reasons, is that the change or orientation made by Vatican II on the role of the priest was not followed up by a change in structures of priestly formation that insures the realization of the desired outcome. The priestly formation after Vatican II, while envisioning a new image of the priesthood, was operating within a structure of the theological orientation of the Council of Trent. The corollary to this reflection is what was perhaps the crucial task of the Eight Synod: to provide workable structural changes that are more effective, more in touch with the changing needs of our time.

A reading of the teachings of the Asian Bishops on the theological point of departure about the priesthood shows that it should not be from what differentiates the priest from the laity. Rather it should begin by setting the ordained ministers immediately within the context of the Christian community where all share in the priesthood of Christ. The priesthood of the ordained, while differing in essence and not only in degree from the priesthood of all the baptized, is related to the common priesthood. Only sharers in this common priesthood can be ordained; they do not lose this common priesthood in their ordination. Further, it is precisely to enable the baptized to actualize their common priesthood the presbyters are ordained. (cf. FABC III, Sampran, 1 1982: *The Church - A Community of Faith in Asia*).

In line with this thinking, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, in describing the model of priest for the Philippines, begins with the ordained minister within the priestly Christian community. (PCP II, part IV, 3)

"The priesthood is instituted within the People of God, for the sake of the people of God. *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (PO 2) re-emphasizes this orientation. It declares that "The priests of the New Testament are by their vocation to ordination set apart in some way in the *midst of the People of God*. . ." (PO 3).

In this perspective the priests and their ministry cannot be taken apart from the community setting. He is ordained for the community. The point of departure in the consideration of the

image of the presbyter is not the distinction but the participation in the one priesthood of Christ. Differing in essence and not only in degree, yet the priesthood of the ordained ministers is not a priesthood separate from the priesthood of the faithful.

In and before the community, the priest is the representative of Christ, the Head, not in the sense that he replaces Christ, but in the sense that he is the sign and instrument of Christ's presence and activity among his people. As a representative of Christ the Head, he is also the leader of the community, but as servant leader.

In serving the community the priest is asked to take the following in consideration:

1. The community he serves is a community formed by the Word of God; hence his primary task is to preach and teach the Word of God.

2. The community is a Eucharistic Community, hence all the ministry of the priest tends to the offering of the Church of God the Father through Jesus Christ. Hence "what is most vital is not a mere multiplication of Masses of the rubrical perfection of Eucharistic celebrations. What is truly necessary is that the whole assembly should become a living offering to God joined to the Eucharistic sacrifice." (*Ibid*).

3. The community is also a prophetic Community. The ordained priest announces the Word of God not only so that the community may have life and be built up into a community of believers but in order that they may in turn become witnesses to the Word they have believed. The special beneficiaries of his prophetic ministry should be the sick, the disabled, the victimized, the poor, the deprived and the weak.

4. The community is a servant community. The ordained priest's service reaches its culmination in the Eucharist but flows into other areas. As the servant leader of a servant community the priest has the task of ordering and coordinating all the gifts of the members for the good of all.

## Missionary Dimension

Cardinal Tomko, expectedly, brought in the *missionary* dimension of the priesthood, in the synodal discussion. Noting that the missionary dimension is present in the ministry of the Church, he concluded that it should also be present in the formation of priest. Every priest must have a clearly defined missionary awareness which will render him fit and ready to pledge himself effectively and with generosity to the best of his abilities. Thus the priest, in the words of the Holy Father, is truly "a missionary throughout the world." For this reason the missionary dimension should be an *essential* part of the formation of priests. This idea was repeated by bishops from the five continents, eventually becoming one of the consensus propositions.

For the Asian Bishops there can be no other subject as important as this. Not because practically all of them labor in mission territory but also because of a certain unfortunate misconception and attitude. It has been remarked that "impression among diocesan priests in Asia was that pioneering missionary work is the special task of foreign missionaries and of religious. Diocesan clergy was usually entrusted with established dioceses and parishes." (cf. S. Karotemprel, SDB.: *Priestly Formation in Asia*, 1990 p. 9). Fortunately this misconception has already been addressed to by the Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples with its *Pastoral Guide for Diocesan Priests*, 1989, p. 4.

The Second Plenary Council, precisely to impress on the minds of the priests the necessary missionary dimension of priestly spirituality says that: "the priest is ordained not only for a particular diocese but for the salvation of the whole world." (Part IV, n. 3). By prayer and material support the priest can assist in the missionary task, and when he feels God calling him, he will respond and announce the Good News in other lands.

## Priestly Spirituality

Another topic which constantly came up during the Synod is the priestly spirituality. The parameters of the synodal reflection are clear. For *Ratio Fundamentalis* the whole subject of spiritual

formation of candidates for the priesthood is aimed at achieving a spirituality that can justly be termed priestly. Many norms have been laid down and many suggestions have been provided in the law itself and in Church documents, so that students can gain "a genuine mature priestly spirituality according to the mind of the Church. (RF 56).

One of the reasons for the uneven interventions on this matter is the ambiguous meaning the word *spirituality*. It sometimes means various devotional exercises, or schools of spirituality with distinguishing characteristics, or a life which is spiritual as contrasted with that aspect of our lives concerned with non-spiritual, for example, our work. In general the ideas of the fathers converge on this understanding of priestly spirituality. There is a life-style, a spirit and a way proper for the priest to live according to the Spirit tending to holiness. This arises from the sacerdotal identity, that is from the configuration to Christ the Pastor and Head of the Church (LG 28).

Starting off from the principle of "imitamini quod tractatis" (cf. Pontificale, PO 13), the priest undertakes to become in life that which he is ontologically by reason of sacerdotal consecration. The means of priestly spirituality, beside the "sincere and untiring exercise of the ministry in the Spirit of Christ" (cf. PO 13) are: intimate friendship with Christ, nurtured by a life of personal prayer and the sacramental life; devotion to the Eucharist, the life of the paschal mystery, life and death (asceticism, chastity) Marian devotion, etc.

FABC, echoing the *Instrumentum Laboris*, insists that "the spiritual formation of priestly formation must take precedence over every other aspect no matter how important or essential another aspect might seem." *The experience of Asian formators* cries out for an innovative program of personal spiritual formation. The Rectors of the Seminaries in Asia ask: "how can the priest be a witness to mystery, the servant and worker of communion, a living sign that renders the Gospel increasingly credible and bears witness to the encounter with the Risen Lord - how can the priest be all these when his formation in the Church's spiritual tradition has been wanting?" (cf. First Congress of Rectors of Asian Seminaries, Statement, in: Cajilig, "Hunger," p. 113).

For this reason the *First Joint Colloquium of the Rectors and Spiritual Directors* spoke about "the centrality of the God experience in seminary formation" (cf. Cajilig, *Tagaytay III*, page 4). BIRA, IV, n. 2 recommended that "formation programs for priests. . . should be geared towards a spirituality which lays greater stress on the values which are expressed in the Word of God especially in the Beatitudes." (cf. FAPA II, p. 425).

For the PCP II the necessary condition for an effective servanthood is authentic priestly spirituality. What are the elements of this servant leader spirituality?

1. *One that is rooted and centered in Christ.* He needs to be immersed in Christ's life, steeped in his wisdom, and imbued with his values. As a priest, he is not only a disciple of the Lord but must teach the Lord's ways to others.

2. *One that is ministerial.* It is through his ministry that he will exercise and grow in pastoral charity and hence in perfection. Especially in view of the scarcity of priests, the joyful and faithful doing of the ministry will demand much of the priest today. But his fidelity will reap much joy in the Lord. He will live according to the Word he preaches; i.e. he will be authentic. An area in which this authentic ministerial spirituality is best expressed is that of total human development of the people. The PCP II says: "While he must not dilute his priestly charism with undue interests in politics and economics, he will make his own the aspirations of the members of his community for a full human journey with them to realize those aspirations. He thus needs and attentive, compassionate, generous and responsive heart which impels him to be in solidarity especially with those who are in need." (*Ibid*).

3. *A Collegial spirituality.* The apostolic ministry, which the bishops have succeeded to and which priests and deacons share in, was a collegial mission. For this reason they should realize that the Lord intends them, as presbyterium, to carry out His work.

4. *Eucharistic.* The Eucharist is the source of the priests power and the summit towards which his ministry tends. He will imitate in life the Eucharist which he celebrates and gather his people around the Eucharistic Lord.



5. *Marian.* The Blessed Virgin Mary must have a special place in the hearts of priests and must serve as a model of the total dedication and sacrifice that the priest must have.

6. *Contemplative.* In the sense that living constantly in the presence of God, seeing things, persons and events in the light of faith.

Some of the means approved by the PCP II towards the realization of gradually building up a clergy in line with the spirituality described above, it was resolved:

Art. 85 #1. The Commission on the Clergy of the CBCP should study and recommend -even develop- models of Christian life or spirituality for priests (diocesan priests especially) which is clearly and closely tied in with the mission of the Church and with the life and culture of the community and integrates in a holistic way ministry and prayer;

#2. The commission should take the leadership in calling a nationwide renewal experience for all priests and bishops in the Philippines, so that, over a three to five year period, all will be able to undergo this updating and credibly call for collaboration in bringing about the Church of the future;

#3. It should spearhead the center or institute for renewal recommended in Art. 80, #2,6' above. The Center should be planned and staffed mainly by diocesan priests and give highest priority to a spirituality of diocesan priests, providing on a regular basis opportunities for needed studies and renewal experience. A pool of resource persons will be necessary for its proper functioning.

Art. 86. The Presbyteral Assembly must be involved in facing and helping to solve problems in the clergy's practical living of the evangelical counsels.

Art. 87. Personality problem of the priests should be dealt with more seriously. To this end, the establishment of houses of affirmation under the auspices of the Episcopal Commission on the Clergy should be given careful consideration.

PCP II specifically took up the diocesan spirituality by saying that the spirituality of the diocesan priests must be diocesan, i.e., it is bound with service to the diocese under the leadership of the bishop.

What elements are involved in this diocesan spirituality? The analysis of the discussions and the approved text of the PCP II on this matters show that some elements of a diocesan spirituality are:

1. The special bonding with the bishop and the priest of the diocese. The canonical reality of his incardination in the diocese means that God wants the priest to work out his salvation and growth in holiness through the service to the diocese in union with his bishop and his presbyterium.

2. *A call to the local Church.* The diocesan priest's mission is grounded in a diocese. They are primarily responsible for all the people and events within the local Church. They do not follow their people if they move beyond their territory, or diocese. They wait to serve the new people who will take their place in the diocese.

3. *A call to special kind of community experience.* A call to conglomerate community, a support system that is a cross section of the Church.

4. *A call that requires a priestly formation with a primary emphasis on pastoral service.* The seminary training or diocesan priest is for the most part very pastoral. It should be adapted to the pastoral needs of our particular territory. We need to be encouraged to walk with the people.

## **Formation to Celibacy**

The Synod fathers made a strong re-affirmation of the rule of celibacy for priests of the Latin Rite and said that it will not be changed. The discussion on priestly celibacy was taken up in the context of formation in *chastity*. Chastity in celibacy is a precious gift from God which perfectly fits the priest's image in the eyes of the Latin church and in the eyes of many of the Oriental churches today. What is the prophetic function today of

priestly celibacy ? To be a sign of God's gratuitous love for humanity through the total dedication of the priest as a person. (cf. *Message to the People of God*).

The rule of celibacy is a constant concern for the Bishops of Asia. The Asian participants in the EAPI Symposium included this observations in their Final Statement. "A change in the current discipline would respond to the needs of some priest, and above all to p73 the needs of God's people who in increasing numbers are being deprived of all but the most frequent celebrations of the Eucharist." (cf. King, *Symposium*, Statement and Recommendations 1-2, pp. 12-13).

PCP II underlines this aspect of the formation in celibacy by saying that "a chaste and loving priest is an outstanding sign of God's presence and grace among His community." (Ibid).

### **Inculturation**

A recurrent theme in the Synod was culture, the force and flavor of the world in which the seminarians and priests live. On the one hand the Synod Fathers were clear about the fact that culture has its influence on seminaries and priests.. It has to be taken into account when we deal with formation for priesthood as well as formation in priesthood. At the same time, the church and its priests must find ways to speak to the culture in which it finds itself. The Good News must be offered in its authentic fullness but in a way that makes sense to those to whom it is addressed. Inculturation was really a big word at the synod.

So with FABC. Already FABC I, recommended that the National Bishops Conferences "seek even better ways of forming the clergy, flexibly adapted to the social, cultural, and spiritual needs of a given community, and firmly anchored in the context of concrete realities through adequate exposure and apprenticeship." (FABC I, *Recommendation* FAPA p. 40).

Inculturation in formation is stressed in the first Congress of Asian Seminary Rectors. They expressed in their *statement* the need of the seminarians and the formators alike "to go in awareness that the mystery of the Incarnation in which Christ made his own the human condition, identifying Himself with the

poor and the suffering in his death and resurrection, provides the paradigm of the needed inculturation of faith." (cf. *Statement, Practical Consequences* in: Cajilig, "Hunger" p. 114).

Formation then is inculturated within the context of the Church and human society. What does this mean for Asian churches? This means in the condition of poverty and suffering leading to "a life of kenosis" (cf. Guillermo Tejon, O.P., "*An Experience of Kenosis*," Cajilig, "Pathway" pp. 175-203). This leads to interiorization in priestly formation beginning with life in unity with Christ and in unity with fellow priests. Archbishop Mathias of Bangalore, in his oral intervention insisted that "all our formation -intellectual, pastoral or spiritual, must flow from and look to an interiorization, and not simply a transfer of information and techniques of pastoral action. This fundamental attitude of interiorization is one that the religious of the East can recall us to in all phases of seminary life."

### Formative Environment

Where should the candidates to the priesthood be formed ? The synodal consensus is - *the major seminary*. It is the normal place of formation. Other forms are seen as less profitable and, therefore, must remain exceptional. Surprisingly though, was the number of voices raised in support of the minor seminary. This is an institution which has practically disappeared in many countries. Probably the principal reason for advocating the minor seminary is the poor quality of formation of many applicants to the seminary.

In every seminary, especially in the major seminaries, there should be a small group of formators stably present chosen by the bishop and under his guidance. This is urge even at the cost of sacrificing other pastoral programs of less priority. The formators should be able to animate community life, fraternally united among themselves and with the bishop. The formators, needless to say, should be systematically prepared.

There is also the discussion about the *preparatory year*, before the higher studies. The idea was very favorably received by the fathers. Just what form, content this preparatory year should take was not altogether clear. For some fathers this may be liken

to a year of novitiate, as if a "special time" to fill up the taps in the spiritual life.

For others it may also serve to complete the general human, literary, catechetical, liturgical formation of the seminarians.

### **Formation of Formators**

Another consensus is the careful preparation of persons who are in charge of the training of future priests: *formation of formators*. There has to be academic formation of seminary staff, obviously, but there also has to be spiritual and pastoral and pedagogical formation so that the seminary personnel are prepared to offer the kind of direction that will help the seminarians grow into the kind of priests the Church needs.

PCP II repeats the call of the Eighth Synod on this matter. It urges that "extreme care be exercised in the choice of formators in our seminaries and in the final acceptance of candidates to the presbyteral order."

### **Ongoing Formation**

Ongoing formation is not only necessary; it is indispensable for all presbyters. It embraces the entire priestly life. It has three important *goals*:

1. the recovery and consolidation of the conviction of priestly identity;
2. the avoidance of fatigue and routinism;
3. to attain a harmonious living of a continuous process of conversation and personal identification with Christ.

A fourth may be added: to acquire a more coherent theological synthesis, the deepening and updating of the ecclesiastical disciplines in the light of the changes arising from culture and from dominant ideology.

The primary *responsibility* of insuring an effective ongoing formation rests on the bishop. It depends also on the

individual priest, particularly on the depth of his conviction about the need to continue the process of spiritual and cultural development.

Obviously the problems in realizing this project were also mentioned in the Hall of Synod. Cardinal Innocenti speaks about some of the problems: the first is the shortage of personnel, priests and members of the laity, prepared and skilled to conduct the permanent formation of the clergy. Then there is the problem of content, in particular, a greater balance between intellectual and pastoral formation, which is generally favored and that of the human and spiritual formation of priests. On the part of the teachers, the problem sometimes arises from a spirit of confrontation with the Magisterium of the Church. In addition there is a dearth of coordinated programmes at regional and national level, and there is sometimes the risk of a bureaucratization and secularization of the on-going formation courses. Finally, how to coordinate and harmonize permanent formation programs for Religious with those for the diocesan.

It was in this connection what the synod agreed to include among the consensus propositions the formulation of a *Directory for the Ongoing Formation*. This Directory will bring together and presents in an organic form the positive experiences of the post-council path in the permanent formation of clergy. A related suggestion is the creation of special centers for the training of those responsible for permanent formation, possibly one per continent.

FABC, even as early as 1977, had already stressed the importance of "renewal programs destined for all priests," including in-service training, a thorough updating along the lines of the new disciplines to be introduced in seminaries, refresher courses, etc." (cf. ACMC, *Conclusion*, n. 127, FAPA I, p. 148.) The Spiritual Directors of Asia are more precise: "... years immediately following ordination, because of the increasing crisis of young priests" (cf. *Statement* in Cajilig, "Pathway," p. 10).

PCP II stresses also the irreplaceable character of the ongoing formation. It sets out also the agenda in the area of ongoing formation:

Art. 80. #1. Continuing education for renewal and updating is a necessity for all priests.

#2. Each diocese must hence set up specific programs (including short courses by invited experts) for this purpose. They should be mandatory for priests after a specific time in the ministry.

1\* Diocesan bishops and priests should be given the option of having a sabbatical leave of at least one semester after every five years or so of active ministry for the purpose of rest and/or further formation.

2\* The expenses of renewal programs should be funded by the diocese with a view to overcoming the reluctance of individuals to avail themselves of these opportunities.

3\* Priests and bishops should undergo periodic on-going formation and training in communication skills and public speaking to enhance their ability to preach the Word of God.

4\* Regular spiritual renewal for all priests in the diocese is mandatory.

5\* The CBCP will set up programs at the national and regional levels for continued updating and renewal.

6\* Along the same lines, a national center for renewal, where priests can come for an extended period of holistic renewal, especially after 15 or more years in the ministry, should be set up.

Art. 82. Among matters of clergy accountability to the community the following should be included:

1\* praying the divine office;

2\* going to confession and hearing confessions;

3\* celebrating mass regularly;

4\* integrating prayer and sacrament in their daily life; and

5\* providing generous service to the community, especially to and the needy.

Art. 83. Priests and bishops should be adequately trained in the managerial and behavioral sciences towards a more fruitful and effective pastoral ministry, and the better to work with people in team ministry.

Art. 84. Military and Philippine Police chaplains, and priests in special ministries should be given more attention vis-a-vis their function, compensation, links with the diocese/parish, etc.

## **Evaluation I-8th Synod of Bishops**

What are some of the features of this Synod?

1. Many who followed the Synod noted a certain return, if such a term may be allowed, to the middle. Old truths, some of which have been partially forgotten, were reaffirmed. Some may see this as a return to the roots, a rediscovering of the rich history of priestly formation. Others may read this as the fear "to break the mould," and dare to try a new one.

2. The presence of many bishops from Eastern Europe, for the first time after 45 years, had a profound effect. The outlook of the Synodal discussion was very Western-oriented, perhaps more precisely Europe-oriented. A reading of the list of participants reveals the presence of an improporportionately big number from the Eastern Europe.

3. In this connection the glaring absence of the Asian face in both the Synodal discussion and the consensus propositions is evident. It is not because the Bishops from Asia were not prepared nor did not have any message. Our Asia-related concerns were simply buried in the wake of the euphoria about the reopening of the Churches in Eastern Europe. This is unfortunate, it is in the Asian Churches that we see highly developed programs of priestly formation. The introductory years, the year of spiritual formation have been existence in the Philippines for more than two decades.

## **Evaluation II- FABC**

How about FABC? There are some identifiable features in the reflection of the Asian Bishops on formation of the priests in



Asia. (cf. Fr. Robert H. Hardawiryana S.J., *Priestly Ministry, Spiritually and Formation*, paper presented to the Asian Bishops Delegates to the Synod. I wish to acknowledge my extensive use of this work for the preparation of this Conference. In general and for this section in particular.)

1. The strong conviction of the need to grow in faith from within Asian realities. Hence the push for inculturation, the development of genuine particular Churches;

2. Frequent emphasis on dialogue with people of other faiths and other religious traditions, and with Asia's poor and deprived masses -always placing before the seminarians and the priests the issues of human rights, integral human development, preferential option for the poor, the need for simple lifestyle for the clergy and a solidarity with the poor. This aspect was hardly taken up in the Synod.

3. The stress on the need for a profound priestly spirituality lived within the ecclesial "communion" and priestly collegiality, and enabling priests to face local or regional situations and conditions in prayerful personal and communitarian discernment.

4. Emphasis on ministerial priesthood not primarily as "singled out" or "distinct" from all other charisms bestowed upon the "lay" members of God's people, but first and foremost as basically united with them and serving them in communion of faith and charity.

Fr. Hardawiryana rightly noted that "these are not just external to the almost 'common' vision of Asian Churches on priestly life and ministry and on priestly formation. They are in fact constituent elements that determine that vision."

### **Evaluation III - PCP II**

The Working Paper on the Clergy was, without doubt, the most debated, and the most criticized in the PCP II. This is indicative of the importance attached to it by the delegates. The reason is obvious for PCP II. "In our cultural context, perhaps nothing on the human plane will influence both the shade of the Church and its impact on Philippine society as palpably as the leadership of its ordained ministers." (PCP II, p. 93)

It is not surprising then that this section of the final Draft of PCP II Document is certainly one of the most important. A vision of the priesthood called for by the Gospel for our times is clearly presented. He is a servant leader representing Christ the Head. His true greatness is measured not so much by the office but by his service.

PCP II's image of the priest is balanced: the Christological dimension is given but underlining too the relationship of the priest to the Holy Spirit and to the Christian Community. It is precise in lining up the elements of the priestly spirituality.

Priest, formators and seminarians, the bishops too have in this section of the PCP II document a balanced, orthodox guidelines for our life and ministry. Here is only one thing to do - faithfully follow them in our lives. By so doing we are giving our share in the renewal and revitalization of our Church, the goal of PCP II.

## Formation in the Spirit of Poverty and the Need for Detachment

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*Victor Aguis*

What I would like to share with you is not so much a study on poverty and the need for detachment in the life of a priest and a seminarian, but rather the experience that we, diocesan priests and seminarians, who have come in contact with the spirituality of the Focolare Movement, are doing, here in the Philippines and abroad. The specific aim of our spiritual experience is not poverty but unity. However, as we see in any other charism approved by the Church, the Charism of unity, as lived in the Work of Mary, (Focolare Movement), answers particularly to the needs and the challenges of our times and it views evangelical poverty as an essential path to enter in the core of the message of Jesus: unity with God and unity with one another.

During my second year of Theology I got alarmed when I started to notice that slowly, slowly, I was losing my faith. Like many of my companions I was struggling to make my acts of piety every day, my superiors considered me a good seminarian, and I was very much accepted by my fellow seminarians. No one, not even spiritual director, could have imagined that the more the time was passing, the more my heart was becoming empty. I felt and loved the call for celibacy but I couldn't understand why a diocesan priest had to lose also the right for the warmth of a family. Seeing the superficiality with my relationship with the others in the seminary, I started to develop an allergy towards whatever had to do with clerical life. It was that time, when I was on the verge of leaving the seminary that,

accidentally, or rather providentially, I came in contact, during a meeting, with the Focolare Movement. I don't remember much of what was said but I remember how surprised and I was to meet priests and seminarians who gave me that warmth of the family I was searching for. I saw in them persons who were fulfilled, on the human and spiritual level. And there I felt that I have found my place. Eagerly I started, together with four of my companions, to live the spirituality of the Gospel as presented by the Focolare Movement and immediately we found ourselves sharing, without any hesitancy, what was happening in our souls and the experiences we were making in living concretely the Gospel. Our hearts and minds opened wide and it seemed that we were understanding all our life in a new light.

Without even thinking about poverty, we spontaneously put all our little possessions in common and from that moment we did not spend one single cent or took any decision before we were sure that it was done in unity with the others. Once our material and spiritual things were put in common, we experienced a great interior freedom, as if a heavy burden was removed from our backs, and the more it became spontaneous to believe literally in every word of the Gospel. Under every word of the gospel we discovered the immense love of God for us. We felt that we have started a beautiful adventure which is both human and divine, and we were ready to give up everything so as not to lose it. We never spoke of the need for detachment because everything was spontaneously lost in the life of unity even how or when we desired to be ordained priests. This choice of God, in the life of unity, came before everything else even before our priesthood. To be detached meant to be a free child in the hands of the loving Father.

The more we were going deeper in this experience, the more we saw how the Father was the one who was continuously moving all the events of our daily life. And so it happened, just to mention one experience, that once we received an invitation to participate in an international meeting of formation for seminarians in Rome. This meeting meant a lot to us, since we were just starting this life and we strongly felt that we had to go deeper in this life. And so it became very clear that we had to go. But where were we to get so much money? For us seminarians, going

abroad seemed an impossible dream. We asked the Father for a sign, believing that if it were His will, money would not be a problem because He would definitely provide it on time. So we simply went to the travel agent and made our ticket reservations. Unexpectedly, a few days later, one of us received a very good scholarship, with an allowance good enough to cover all the expenses that we needed for our trip.

Work has an essential role in our lives and in our formation, because it was a fundamental element in the house of Nazareth which we take as the model for our life of unity. There Jesus, Mary and Joseph worked at manual labour. We work not only to earn our living, so as not to be a burden on others, but also to be able to support those who are in greater need. We see this very clearly in the Gospel in the way Jesus formed his apostles. They had to work to support themselves; if they had to preach by day, they had to work by night, even if, at times, wrote in his letters that he worked not only to support himself so that he would not be a burden to anyone, but also, so as to be able to support the needy ones, and here we see clearly that the concept of evangelical poverty is always open to communion. In our house, here in Tagaytay, we give very much importance to manual work. Work is very important aspect in the formation of a human being. A man who does not like to work has no right to eat. Work develops our human dignity and through work we can also identify ourselves with the majority of the people arounds us who earn their living "by the sweat of their brow." We are the ones who do the marketing, prepare our meals, wash and iron our clothes, clean the house, do maintenance work, tend the garden and raise some animals. We notice that manual work is a very good occasion to enter in deeper rapport with God in prayer, and it becomes a concrete expression of our love for the others. A seminarian, whose work was ironing the clothes, one day, upon seeing a mountain of shirts to be ironed, was tempted to look first for his shirts, but instead decided to start with the shirts of one with whom, the day before, he had a little misunderstanding. At the end he finished by ironing all the other shirts before ironing his own shirts. It was a way to prove to himself that he was ready to die for the others. It is a fact that, often times, manual work causes painful cuts to our egoism and pride. A newly ordained priest, whose work in the house was to wash the

toilets everyday, told us how this daily job, often times, became a moment of deep union with God. Every time he was struggling to clean to perfection in each one of us. Once a psychiatrist, who declared herself to be an atheist, happened to visit our house. She started to argue about religion, and to reveal how much she had suffered in her life. While passing through our dining room, she noticed how an old priest, with a beautiful smile on his face, was preparing our table, with so much love and patience, placing the forks and spoons on the table. She stared at him and then, after a moment of silence, she said: "Now I understand the power of Gospel."

Our first duty is to have always the presence of Jesus in our midst. We don't pray, we don't play, we don't make apostolate, and we don't work, if we are not in the disposition of having Jesus in our midst. One of the confirmations, of how important the presence of Jesus in our midst is to our life, is the realization of the promise of Jesus: "Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well." In this light, providence, even in material things, becomes like the barometer of our lives. It always shows whether or not we are truly searching for his kingdom before everything else. It happened once, that I received a letter asking me to acknowledge the receipt of a cheque that was sent to us as providence. It was a big sum of money, but the cheque never arrived. In this we immediately saw a sign that God wanted to tell us something. I soon realized that, during those days, we had slowed down in our commitment to live only for God; we had started to take each other for granted. We immediately renewed our pact of being ready to die for one another and started again to love concretely one another, especially, in the smallest things. It was not a surprise when we saw that the money we needed soon arrived from other sources of providence. Indeed this Divine Providence is an everyday reality in our lives. In it there is no distinction between "big" and "small" facts; all of them are great, because they are all expressions of the love of God. The mystery of material Providence, in the lives of Christians, has always been one of the most unfathomable ones, because it is part of the manifestation of God, as proper to Himself, as it has been revealed to us by Jesus Himself: His Fatherhood.

We are all in one way or another, afflicted by worries about material things. We ourselves have to be sure the income will be enough to cover the expenses up to the end of the month. And, as you can imagine, the monthly contributions, coming from the seminarians, are not even enough to cover half of the needed budget. When the responsible of our house died, I thought that we were really going to have a serious financial problem. He had many friends abroad who used to send us regular providence, which not only covered our expenses but it even enabled us to share, often times, our surplus with many others. So what were expected to do? We immediately understood that it was not God's will for us to go around asking for money. It was clear enough that we had to stay at home and instead of being preoccupied with money we had to concentrate more on how to go deeper in our life of unity so as to continue to help those who are in contact with us. With faith, we simply entrusted everything to the Father who has all the money we all need. Months passed and we noticed that our financial situation remained the same as before.

Evangelical poverty is not only important for us priests but it was equally important for every christian. We can help our faithful discover this if they see how our lives have improved because of the Evangelical poverty that we ourselves are living. Considering the fact that all material things to God, we for first have to give witness that we are only administrators of the money and other things entrusted to us. As we find it written in one of the early writings of the Church about monastic life: "The Lord trusts you. You must be good administrators." i.e. good workers who know how to save money, "in order that you can help those in need until we reach the point of absolute equality." When one of us is assigned as a new parish priest, we see together how to organize his economy and we start by making a clear distinction between what belongs to the parish and what belongs to him. It is then, that living Evangelical poverty, he can administer well his personal money. He reports whatever he earns and whatever he spends in a detailed report at the end of every month. What remains as superfluous is considered as the "capital of God" and is issued either for our apostolate, or given to other priests who are in need, or given to the poor.

When we share what we don't need we are not only imitating the goodness of our Father in Heaven, but we are also living and imitating the simplicity and harmony that we see in God. We see to it that we have no less than what we need for our life; this would testify that God, as Father, takes good care of us. On the other hand, we should not have more than what we need because what is more is disharmony on the moral and social level. Nature is beautiful because the essence of its entity coincides with its identity. If I were to keep and store in my room, for example, whatever I like to receive as gifts from the others, soon my room will become a warehouse and it will lose its harmony making it very difficult for me to live in it, I will find it hard to rest, to pray and to study. We have found it very helpful for our life, so as to remain simple, that at the end of the year we put aside whatever we do not need in a parcel and give it to others. If I see that in those extra eight shirts do not belong to me and if I don't give them up I am abusing of this capital of God. It is of my attachment to them, they become a tumor in our life of unity.

A serious danger, in our lives as priests, is avidity. Avidity hampers our freedom. St. Paul writes: "I have learned to be happy in times of superabundance as well as in times of hardships." We need to remain free so as to work for the kingdom of God. Therefore, it would be more helpful if we are not conditioned by anything, whether it be material things, person, idea, inspiration, assignment, etc. One single tiny string tied to the leg of a bird is enough to prevent it from flying. Avidity is self-attachment. In our society, consumerism is creating the false "ego." And we see how this "ego" acts always in terms of having, of possession, of power. But we know that the "I," this "ego," means relation, and if it develops more in relation to possession, to power, as a consequence, it destroys relationships. Therefore, if we do not make ourselves free from these attachments we will never become fulfilled persons because we will never be able to enter in a true relationship with the others. We can see this clearly in the way relationships are lived in the Trinity. The Father is the perfect Father because He gives Himself completely to the Son. The Son is the perfect Son in as much as He is completely empty of Himself and lives the Father. In the life of unity, we become realized persons, in as much as we lose



ourselves, out of love, in the others. This is the vocation of man who is created in the image of God.

Whatever Jesus said and did during His earthly life, was to lead us in becoming mature and perfect human beings. In revealing to us the Father, for sure, He did not want to give us the impression that God wants us to have a miserable life, here on earth, so that when we will die we will receive a reward in heaven. This would be absurd. Whatever the Gospel tells us to live is for the good of the human life. We find it very important that these concepts enter well in our minds as well as in our preaching. Often times we like to make distinctions saying: "Humanly speaking," or "on the spiritual level." When we say humanly, it means evangelically, because Jesus became man to reveal man to men. Therefore, the evangelical counsels are not optional things that one can choose so that one can go on a higher supernatural level. They are counsels that if we live them we become men like Jesus, the perfect man. Personally, I find it *hard to understand why, on our day of ordination we, diocesan priests, say "yes" to chastity and obedience. . . . . and what about poverty?*

In becoming man, Jesus lived in poverty, because otherwise, He couldn't be a priest. Without poverty how could He be one with the Father and one with every person, so as to bring back unity? And where did Jesus enter in full communion with every person of the past, present, and future, if not on the cross? The famous Yung, who is an atheist, explains that when Jesus on the cross cries out his forsakenness, there He is the perfection of man. He touches the divinity because of the absolute and total lack of everything. He no longer has any affection, goods, disciple, — nothing — the absolute nothingness. And, inspite of this nothingness, the unity between heaven and earth is established. Jesus crucified and forsaken is our Ideal as priests. It is there on the cross that He is the perfect priest and the perfect victim. He teaches us to be so poor of everything, even spiritually, that God could enter in us and the Holy Spirit could move among us. And giving away everything we shall possess God, and with Him the hundredfold here on earth and eternal life.

## St. John of the Cross: the Dark Night and the Union of Love

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Fausto Gomez, O.P.

*The article printed below was given as a morning conference by the author to an amicable and absorbed audience of professors and students of Sacred Theology in the Martyr's Hall of the Central Seminary, University of Santo Tomas on January 22, 1992, to honor the fourth centenary of the death of St. John of the Cross. We publish it here because it is both timely and thought provoking. Fr. Gomez neither analyzes nor answers the entire problematic of juanista studies (that would take volumes), but he raises contemporary concerns and points to text that show both the artistry and the humanity behind the profound doctrine of the Mystical Doctor. With these sentiments in mind we hope that the written version of his conference will have something of the same charm and instructive aid for our readers as it has for us who were privileged to hear it first pronounced.*

*The Editor*

### Introduction

It is a little after midnight. The bell of the Carmelite Convent in Ubeda (Jaen) rings calling the friars to Matins. The dying priest says softly: "Glory be to God. I am going to pray Matins to heaven." Then, he kisses a crucifix and prays slowly: "In manus tuas, Domine, commendo spiritum meum" – *Into your hands, Lord, I commend my spirit.* And he dies calmly, peace-

fully. The man is John of the Cross. The day, December 14, 1591.

Four hundred years later, the death of John of the Cross represents a unique point of departure to recall, evoke and celebrate his singular life. Unparalleled poet, outstanding theologian, extraordinary mystic and Doctor of the Church, the 16th century Carmelite Reformer has something important to tell us today, as we journey through the last decade of the 20th century.

What could be relevant for us in the life and teachings of the author of *The Dark Night* and *The Living Flame of Love*? Let us try to answer first a more radical question: Who is John of the Cross?

## 1. JOHN OF THE CROSS: LIFE AND WORKS

It took me some time before feeling attracted to John of the Cross. My lingering impressions were, for a time, rather negative: he seemed to me too demanding, too cold, and even a sad saint; somewhat irrelevant, from the perspective of liberation theology. My false impressions began to change when Teresa of Avila introduced John of the Cross to me.

The author of "Las Moradas" (*The Mansions*) convinced me to approach the writer of "Cantico Espiritual" (*The Spiritual Canticle*). Thus I started to read the life of St. John of the Cross by Crisologo de Jesus, O.C.D.

Like every human life, John's has a beginning, in a particular place, at a concrete time in history. He was born in Fontiveros, Avila, Castille, Spain, in 1542. His life, then, developed through the Spanish 16th century, the Golden Century highlighted by the colonization of the New World, the Inquisition, the flowering of the arts, theology and mysticism; it is the century of Miguel de Cervantes, Francisco de Victoria, Bartolome de las Casas, Luis de Leon, Ignacio de Loyola, Teresa de Jesus and Juan de la Cruz.

Juan is the third son of Gonzalo Yepes and Catalina Alvarez. Juan Yepes lived the first six years of his life in Fontiveros. Here he lost his second brother Luis and his father.

Looking for greener pastures, widowed Catalina goes with her two sons (Francisco and Juan) to Arevalo, an important city of Avila, and, after three years, to Medina del Campo, then a great and prosperous city in Valladolid – and, therefore, the refuge of many poor people, including the Yepes family.

The Yepes family was poor. Catalina and Francisco (and his wife Ana Izquierdo) worked for the flourishing textile industry, but in menial jobs. Their income was not enough. Juan, then, knew poverty and became a friend of the poor: his brother Francisco often brought a very poor person home – one he met on the streets of Arevalo or Medina del Campo – to give him a roof, to share with him his bread and, at night, his blanket.

In Media del Campo (1551-1563), he studies with the Jesuits rhetoric, grammar and the arts and decides to enter the Carmelite Order in 1563. With the new habit, he takes a new name: Juan Yepes becomes Juan de Santo Matia.

From Medina del Campo, where he made his religious profession, he is sent to the famous university of Salamanca (Castille), where he studies (1564-1568) philosophy and theology. His biographers tell us that Juan de Santo Matia leads an exemplary life – an austere, prayerful and studious life. He is ordained priest in Salamanca in 1567.

The inauguration of the first Reformed Convent of Carmel (men's branch) took place in November 28, 1568, in Duruelo (Avila). On this day, Fray Juan de Santo Matia becomes Fray Juan de la Cruz.

While the Descalced Carmelites grow in number very rapidly, the Carmelites of the Observance (Calzed Carmilites) do not; both belong still to the same branch of the Carmelite Order. But their mutual relationships are not cordial; as a matter of fact, there are some major conflicts. One of them, with John of the Cross, the reformer, now confessor and spiritual director of Teresa and her nuns at La Encarnacion, in Avila. These are very happy with the young and saintly friar; but not the Calzed Carmelites of Avila. Why? The friars of the Observance consider John of the Cross as too radical – a rebel! What to do? Punish him properly; that is, send him to prison. Some of his Carmelite brothers visit him and tell him: "Consider yourself a prisoner."

John of the Cross answers them: "Congratulations! Let us go." They travel together to the prison in the convent of Toledo (Castille).

For nine months (1577-1578), John of the Cross suffers incredible things: he is scourged, disciplined, locked up in solitary confinement, defamed... They even try to bribe him; they offer him positions – and a golden cross: "He who looks for Christ naked has no need of golden jewels," John of the Cross tells his jailers. Later on, he will excuse them: "They did it because they thought they were doing the right thing." Mother Teresa of Avila explains the terrible sufferings of her confessor and adviser: "God treats his friends in a terrible manner; but without offense, because this is the manner He treated His Son."

In August 1578, John of the Cross escapes from prison to become thereafter the indisputable spiritual director of the Reformed Carmelites of Mother Teresa of Avila, the single most important person – with Teresa – in the Reform of the Carmelite Men, superior of different convents in Andalucia (El Calvario, Baeza, Granada), the great writer of theological and mystical books.

After being prior in Segovia (Castille), 1588-1591, John of the Cross is persecuted again; this time by his own Descalzed Brothers, now already separated completely from the Observance. But John of the Cross went through the final stage of his life with unusual serenity, patience, humility and joy. Joy!

According to his biographers, John of the Cross possessed *permanent* joy! If the nuns he directed appeared sad, he consoled them – with spoken or written words. Once, a witness tells us, John of the Cross shouted joyfully: "Oh que buen Dios tenemos!" (*O what a good God we have!*) On one occasion, a nun, Sor Francisca, asked him: "Why are you so happy?" John of the Cross answered her: "Why should I not be after having worshiped and seen my Lord?" (He had just visited the Blessed Sacrament). *John of the Cross, a sad saint?* (Can there truly be a sad Saint?) Not at all. His poems, his works overflow with serenity, gentleness, love, joy.

Reading the life of the great mystic leads necessarily to his writings, that are, after all, an extension of his life. Federico

Ruiz Salvador, an *expert* on St. John of the Cross, advised me thus: "The first norm to read him is this: try to be attuned spiritually. Experience shows that he is better understood by persons with the proper spirit but without much culture than by others with great culture but without spirit."

I was further advised to start reading his minor works, including his poems and letters. These constitute the best introduction to his major works. Thus, I read *Sayings of Light and Love*, *Counsels to a Religious on How to Reach Perfection*, *The Precautions* and others. The poems are moving and beautiful: one may begin reading his minor works with the *Romances*. I was fascinated by John of the Cross' *Prayer of a Soul Taken with Love*.

After reading some of the minor works of John of the Cross, I plunged myself into his major works. I entered first into *The Spiritual Canticle* (CB); this led me to the others. As we all know, his major works are *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* ("Subida del Monte Carmelo":S), *The Dark Night* ("Noche oscura":N), *The Spiritual Canticle* ("Cantico espiritual") and *The Living Flame of Love* ("Llama de amor viva":LB). The first two are considered like one work – and an unfinished one: while *The Ascent* speaks mainly of active purgation, *The Night* talks of passive purgation. The other two are complete in themselves, but may be considered as another binomium: both develop the union of love between the soul and God, and its various stages.

In all his works, John of the Cross is a poet, a mystic and a theologian. He is an excellent lyrical poet. It is said that his most popular poem is *The Canticle* but, his best, *The Night* (B. Jimenez Duque).

## 2. THE DARK NIGHT

Many persons from the West as well as from the East follow John of the Cross' path in his relentless search for God's love. And many more are drawn to him by his dark night. In some countries, including Sweden, *The Dark Night* is a best-seller!

In a world that gives all kinds of things but not much happiness, the dark night of John of the Cross is mysteriously

appealing to many of our contemporaries, who live in the darkness of suffering, injustice, meaninglessness, in the aridity of the desert. The dark night of John of the Cross, however, is not only emptiness, trials and disgrace. It is these, but as a way to feel God's presence in our lives, to experience Him in our wounded human condition. Suffering is night, then, "if there is a response of faith, love and hope" (F. Ruis Salvador).

The symbol of the night possesses particular appeal to people from the East. Ichiro Okumura, now a Carmelite priest, was converted to Catholic Christianity through the instrument of the contemplative Carmelite tradition, in particular of John of the Cross. Writes Okumura: "In the world of the 'dark night', I could find points of contact with oriental 'nothingness'."

On the central path leading to Mount Carmel, or Mount of Perfection, John of the Cross writes "nada" nothing (he is the doctor of the "nadas") six times; and on the mountain, once more, nothing. John of the Cross uses also other words similar to nothingness: self-denial, nakedness, detachment, poverty, emptiness. He tells Ana de Peñalosa, the lay woman for whom he wrote *The Living Flame of Love*: "Nothing, nothing, until leaving one skin and another for Christ." *Isn't he really too demanding?*

He would be truly demanding if he used those ascetical words as the principal ones, or as the end of his spirituality. But, John of the Cross uses them not as end but as means to the end; not as key words, but as subordinate words. The key word is love and the end is the union of love with God. Now to attain that union, the mystic tells us, we have to go through the night, for to be possessed by God, we have to be dispossessed of everything else: "The heart is not satisfied with anything less than God" (CB, 35, 1).

Walking through the dark night, we ask: *God or creatures?* Only God: He is "todo" (everything). Compared with him, the creatures are "nada" (nothing). John of the Cross writes: Since love of God and attachment to creatures are contraries, they cannot exist in the same will (1 S, 6, 1).

At the beginning of the journey through the night, the soul has to leave "the flowers" while searching for the Beloved Son of

God. Once the soul is deeply united to God in love, then the creatures are seen in God's light and the soul loves them: they are the creation of the Beloved; they are "graceful," "clothed in beauty"; their beauty is also "the beauty of the Son of God" (CB, 36,7). In a sense, the creatures "are" the Beloved, God: "insomuch as the soul in this case is united to God, she feels that all things are God" (CB, 14-15, 5):

*Mi Amado las montañas. . .*  
My Beloved is the mountains,  
And lonely wooded valleys,  
Strange islands,  
And resounding rivers,  
The whistling of love-stirring breezes,  
The tranquil night  
At the time of the rising dawn,  
Silent music (*"la musica callada"*),  
Sounding solitude (*la soledad sonora*),  
The supper that refreshes and deepens love  
(*La cena que recrea y enamora*) (CB, 14-15).

All things are God's! And of the soul united to God in love:

*Mios son los cielos y mia es la tierra. . . .*  
Mine are the heavens and mine is the earth. Mine are the nations, the just are mine, and mine the sinners. The angels are mine, and the Mother of God, and all things are mine; and God himself is mine and for me, because Christ is mine and all for me (*Prayer of a Soul Taken with Love*).

The purgation of the senses and of the spirit through the dark night implies acceptance of trials. The trials of life are often an obstacle to reaching the dawn of transforming love. "God would want all to be perfect," John of the Cross tells us, but He finds many of us unwilling to bear suffering and accept trials – to purify our love (L, 2, 27), to be patient, to trust in God, the main agent through the active night, and the agent of the passive night, infused contemplation and the transforming union of love between Him and the soul: God "does not fail those who seek Him with a simple and righteous heart" (1 N, 10, 4).



As we walk through the night, the dark night becomes later a "glad" (N, 3) and "tranquil" (CB, 14-15, 22) and "serene" night (CB, 39):

*Oh noche que guiaste!*  
*Oh noche amable mas que la alborada!*  
*Oh noche que juntaste*  
*Amado con amada,*  
*amada en el Amado transformada!*

O guiding night!  
O night more lovely than the dawn!  
O night that has united  
the Lover with His beloved,  
transforming the beloved in her Lover!

*(The Dark Night, 5)*

Why the heavy stress on detachment, mortification and trials? Because we have to follow Christ: "If it is not to imitate Him, this life is not good" (*Letter*, July 6, 1591); "A man makes progress only through imitation of Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life" (2 S, 7, 8).

The following of Jesus Christ, the Spouse, the Beloved, the Son of God demands Gospel radicalism: "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself, take up his cross and follow me" (Mk 8:34-35; cf. Mt 6:19-24). John of the Cross advises us: "Let Christ crucified be enough for you" (*Maxims on Love*, 13)

Then, only one thing is necessary: following the crucified Lord. Teresa of Avila said: "God alone suffices." John of the Cross tells us: *Jesus Christ alone suffices!*

Jesus Christ carrying the cross, for the cross is the staff of the journey of life: "Do not seek Christ without the cross" (*Letter to Fr. Luis de San Angelo*, not dated); "He who seeks not the cross of Christ seeks not the glory of Christ" (*Maxims on Love*, 23).

Some of our contemporaries are turned off by the cross of St. John of the Cross. Influenced by our secular and materialistic world, that overvalues comfort, they flee from the cross. Even

among Christians, some prefer to speak almost exclusively of the Risen Lord, not of the crucified Lord. John of the Cross is reminding us powerfully that there can be no resurrection without crucifixion; no crucifixion without the cross. And without the cross – suffering, trials, mortification –, there can be no genuine liberation.

Some socially committed writers have criticized John of the Cross for being, apparently, personally individualistic and socially unconcerned. They have labeled his spirituality as *evasive*, that is, as not liberating. *Is it really not liberating?*

The spirituality of John of the Cross that hinges on the dark night, including the darkness of injustice, and the flame of love in solidarity, is not -cannot be- evasive, but a truly liberating spirituality, which is a dynamic process of conversion from sin (blind darkness) to grace (light) and love (incandescent flame) – and more grace and love (cf. LB, 3, 70-71).

Through the dark night of purgations, the human being is progressively liberated from the slavery of the senses and the pride of the spirit, from attachment to things: “Oh what a sheer grace it is for the soul to be freed from the house of its senses”; “the life of the spirit is true freedom and wealth and embodies inestimable goods” (2 N, 14, 3).

John of the Cross is a great contemplative; this is his unique charism in Christ’s Church. And, as a true contemplative, he is in solidarity with humanity: “John of the Cross does not teach a closed up and selfish contemplative life. His contemplation is not aimed at enjoying love, but at possessing much love and share it with others, with the Church” (B. Jimenez Duque).

Pointing out the twelve stars of perfection, the Spanish mystic puts first love of God and second love of neighbor: “Anyone who does not love the neighbor, abhors God” (*Maxims and Counsels: Other Counsels*, 9).

As a Descalzed Carmelite, he was truly poor in spirit and fact, he loved the poor very much, and he keeps telling us to love

them, for not to love the poor is contrary to Christ's doctrine (3 S, 25, 4). "The poor man who is naked will be clothed, and the soul that is naked of desires and whims will be clothed by God with His purity, satisfaction, and will" (*Maxims on Love*, 19).

### 3. THE UNION OF LOVE

With *night*, the other two important symbols in the writings of John of the Cross are *spiritual espousal* or *marriage*, and *flame*.

While the dark night of purgations underlines the *negative aspect* of Christian life, the flame of love with the other virtues (and the sacraments and prayer) stresses its *positive aspect*.

In the dark night, the soul is united to God through the theological virtues: faith empties the intellect of its natural understanding and prepares it for union with the divine wisdom, hope empties the memory from all creature possessions and fixes it on the possession of eternal life, and charity "empties and annihilates the affections and appetites of the will of whatever is not God and centers them on Him alone" (2 N, 21, 11).

Through hoping and loving faith, the soul moves forward to the perfect union of love with God possible in this life (towards spiritual marriage), when the soul becomes "somehow God through participation" – "like the shadow of God" (LB, 3, 78). With the light of faith, remembering eternal life as the object of hope, and wounded with God's love, the soul calls out and seeks the Beloved: *Where have You hidden, Beloved, and left me moaning?* (CB, 1).

In poetic, theological and mystical terms, John of the Cross narrates the absorbing story of the soul searching for the Beloved and encountering Him and marrying Him. It is a unique love story. Love, love, love... Everybody is talking about love! *What does John of the Cross tell us of love?*

Love is charity, the form of all virtues (St. Thomas Aquinas), the animator of life and activities: the soul in love loves God in all things, and "her pleasure in all things and in all transactions is always the light of loving God" (CB, 27, 8).

Loving God prayerfully: Prayer is "a loving encounter with God," that "we should never leave: "Whoever flees prayer flees all this" is good" (*Other Counsels*, 11). John of the Cross favors silent, contemplative prayer; and the Our Father, as the great vocal prayer and a permanent form of love (cf. *SS*, 44, 4).

Love is not something, but Someone: God is Love, and Love is *love of God*: "God loves us that we might love by means of the very love He bears towards us" (*Letter*, October-November, 1591); "This love is the end for which we were created" (CB, 29, 3).

Love of God is filial and nuptial love. Love of God is *love of Jesus Christ*, the Beloved Son of God – the center of *The Canticle*. Through Jesus Christ, it is *Trinitarian love* (cf. Jn 14:23). *Love is love of the Holy Spirit*: the flame of love in *The Living Flame of Love* is the Holy Spirit.

On our way to a deeper love, to the transforming union of love, we are asked to practice love in the active as well as in the contemplative life: "Everything I do, I do with love and everything I suffer, I suffer with the delight of love" (CB, 28, 8).

Delightful pain, sweet wounds, delicious burnings, the glory of suffering. . . – the paradoxical language of deep love. A love that cannot be but warm, hot like fire. *John of the Cross, a cold saint?* Impossible: he is in love with God, in deep love with the Beloved. United in transforming union of love with the Holy Spirit, the saint from Fontiveros exclaims:

O souls created for these grandeurs and called to them!  
What are you doing? How are you spending your time?  
Your aims are base and your possessions misery! (CB, 39, 7).  
May the most sweet Jesus, Bridegroom of faithful souls, be pleased to bring all who invoke His name to this glorious marriage. To him be honor and glory, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, *in saecula saeculorum*. Amen (CB, 40, 7).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Through these pages, we have tried to give you, dear readers, an appetizer on John of the Cross. We invite you fraternally to partake of the main course, plunging yourselves faithfully and

perseveringly into his works. As a great Doctor of the Church, he belongs to the Church, to the People of God, to us all. Let us read him, then, and we will be helped on our pilgrimage, like Therese of the Child Jesus, Elizabeth of the Trinity, Charles de Foucauld, Edith Stein (Teresa Benedict of the Cross), Simone Weil – and many others. Segundo Galilea has written: “The more we want to renew our spirituality and live our Christian commitment more radically, the more John of the Cross’ doctrine seems indispensable.”

Let us, then, read St. John of the Cross and, above all, let us accompany him by following Jesus Christ. Following Him by witnessing love. “A la tarde te examinaran en el amor” – *In the evening, you will be examined in love* (*Sayings of Light and Love*, 57). In the evening: Not only at the end of life, but also “at the end of every day, of every activity, of every act or omission, you will be judged by the quality of your love of God,” (J. Vicente Rodriguez).

At the end of this reflection, John of the Cross asks you and me to be always in God’s love:

The soul that walks in love neither tires nor is tired.

Put love where there is none, and you will reap love.

The only language God hears is the silent language of love.

In the evening, you will be examined in love.

# The Priest the Pray-er for the People of God by Praying the Psalms

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*Herman Mueller, S.V.D.*

## 1. Priest a teacher, priest and pastor

Every priest is a teacher, priest and pastor.<sup>1</sup> In the ordination rite the bishop says to the people and to the ordinandi.

It is true that the entire people of God, as a holy people, constitute a royal priesthood in Christ. Nevertheless our high priest Jesus Christ chose certain disciples to undertake in his name the public ministry of priesthood in the Church for the sake of others. As he was sent by the Father, he sent the apostles into the world so that through them and their successors, the bishops, he might continue for ever his work as Teacher, Priest and Pastor. Presbyters are co-workers of the college of bishops since they are joined to bishops in the priestly office and are called to serve the people of God.<sup>2</sup>

Of these three priestly offices we often hear and we often meditate on.

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<sup>1</sup>Richard P. McBrien, *Catholicism*, vol. 1 (Oak Grove: winston Press, 1988), p. 557.

<sup>2</sup>The Ordination to the Presbyterate (Manila: Catholic Trade School, 1973), pp. 5-6.

## 2. Priest a pray-er for the people of God

But less often do we hear that the priest is also the man who shall pray for the people of God. And that starts already with the diaconate. The bishop gives the deacon the breviary as the prayerbook to pray for the people of God and asks him:

Are you resolved to enrich and safeguard a spirit of prayer appropriate to your way of life, and in this spirit, according to your state of life, to celebrate faithfully the Liturgy of the Hours for the Church and indeed for the whole world?<sup>3</sup>

Do we priests really make prayer a priority in our life?

## 3. Psalms the bulk of the breviary

The greatest part of the breviary consists of psalms. The psalms however were composed 4000-2000 years ago, in a culture which is not our own. Consequently, they are not always our taste. They are like crackers which we must chew to make them our own.

## 4. Christ the model in making psalms our own prayer

Christ gives us the best example of how to do this. He prayed Ps 22 on the cross. And by making this psalm his very own prayer, although it was not composed for him, he received the strength to endure the anguish, dereliction and pains of the crucifixion and did not despair and give up, cursing God and then die as the one robber did,<sup>4</sup> but he rather died with a shout of confidence and victory: "Father, into your hands I command my spirit" (Lk 23:46). "It is consummated" (Jn 19:30). Father, I am coming home.

## 5. Two sentiments in Ps 22: Despair and confidence

There are two sentiments expressed in this psalm: Despair and confidence. And they alternate at regular intervals. A mood

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<sup>3</sup>The Ordination to the Diaconate (Manila: Catholic Trade School, 1978), p. 16.

<sup>4</sup>Lk 23:39: "One of the criminal hanging in crucifixion blasphemed him: 'Aren't you the Messiah? Then save yourself and us.'"

of despair is followed by a sentiment of confidence. It's the way Christ must have felt on the cross.

Despair: vv. 2-4

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me, far from my prayer, from the words of my cry? O my God, I cry out by day, and you answer not: by night and there is no relief for me.

Christ prays. It was not because these are just the words of the psalm that Jesus prayed that way, but rather this was the way he felt deep in his heart. How can a God-man shout: "My God, my God why have you forsaken me?" God forsakes nobody. It's the mystery of the God-man which we do not understand. We can only try to feel our way into this mystery. Christ had volunteered to atone for the sins of mankind. And now he felt something of the pains and forsakenness of those in hell. We are created to rest in God, and we are restless till we rest in him. And these people in hell would just like to do this and cannot do it because before they died they had decided: "I do not want to serve. I do not want to do your will." And God had accepted this decision and let them go to hell for all eternity.

b. Confidence: vv. 4-6

Hardly had Jesus sighed the deepest sigh of loneliness and forsakenness any man could ever utter when a note of confidence comes up in his mind, expressed in verses 4-6:

Yet you are enthroned in the holy place, O glory of Israel! In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and they escaped; in you they trusted, and they were not put to shame.

The fact that God helped the forefathers is guarantee that he will help Christ also.

a. Despair: vv. 7-9

But then loneliness gets the upperhand again. Christ once more feels forsaken:



But I am a worm, not a man; the scorn of men, despised by the people. All who see me scoff at me; they mock me with parted lips, they wag their heads: He relied on the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, if he loves him.

This is exactly what the people standing beneath the cross say (*Mt 27:42-43*):

He saved others but he cannot save himself! So he is the king of Israel! Let's see him come down from that cross and then we will believe in him. He relied on God; let God rescue him if he wants to.

b. Confidence: vv. 10-11

Then Jesus reflects on his birth, and all despair is gone for a while. After all, if the Father was ever close to him it was then. And so he prays with the psalmist:

You have been my guide since I was first formed, my security at my mother's breast. To you was I committed at birth, from my mother's womb you are my God. Be not far from me, for I am in distress; be near for I have no one to help me.

Only God can form a man. And whomever God has made, he both loves and sustains in life, otherwise God would not have made him.

This is what kept Job from despairing (*Jb 10:8-11*):

Your hands have formed me and fashioned me from clay! Will you then bring me down to dust again? Did you not pour me out as milk and thicken me as cheese?<sup>6</sup> With skin and flesh you clothed me, with bones and sinews knit me together.

God is consistent: Whomever he has created he keeps in existence. The mere fact that I am born is guarantee that God loves me.

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<sup>6</sup>This is a poetical description of the conception.

That same idea is expressed once more in *Wisd* 11:24-26: For you love all things that are and loathe nothing that you have fashioned. And how could a thing remain, unless you willed it; or be preserved, had it not been called forth by you? But you spare all things, because they are yours, O Lord and lover of life.

Jesus is alive, and that is proof that God loves him. The Father has no interest in leaving the Son now.

Despair: vv. 13-20

Despair once more approaches the heart of Jesus. This is expressed in vv. 13-20:

Many bullocks surround me; the strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. They open their mouths against me like ravening and roaring lions. I am like water poured out; all my bones are racked. My heart has become like wax melting away within my bosom. My throat is dried up like baked clay, my tongue cleaves to my jaws; to the dust of death you have brought me down. Indeed many dogs surround me, a pack of evildoers closes in upon me; they have pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones. They look on and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my vesture they cast lots.

It is not difficult to see how what the obscurely prophetic psalmist said centuries before perfectly fits in the life of Jesus now, hanging on the cross. He suffers from horrible thirst as all crucified did, so that he soon is shouting: "I am thirsty" (*Jn* 19:28). He is mocked by all those standing under the cross. One can easily compare them to claffing dogs. The bones of a crucified were literally racked. Yes, Jesus' hands and feet are pierced (*Mt* 27:35 par; *Jn* 20:25). His garments are divided (*Mt* 27:35-36 par). He has nothing any more which he could claim his own. He shall die totally poor, completely naked.

But this long note of despair is not the last of what Jesus experiences. Confidence gains the upper hand:

But you, O Lord, be not far from me; O my help, hasten to aid me. Rescue my soul from the sword, my loneliness from the grip of the dog. Save me from the lion's mouth; from the horns of wild bulls, my wretched life.

## 6. Fruits of Christ's suffering

Then comes to Jesus' mind how many will profit from his suffering as it is outlined in vv. 23-32:

a. The first fruit of his suffering will be that mankind will be redeemed by his suffering (vv. 23-27).

b. All tribes turn to the Lord God because of Jesus' death (vv. 28-30b). He will become a life-giving Spirit (1 Co 15:45), the father of many nations (Is 53:10).

c. Jesus himself will rise (vv. 30c-32).

## 7. Dying with confidence

With this conviction that his suffering is not in vain Jesus confidence becomes unperturbed. And so he can only shout a shout of victory: "It is finished" (Jn 19:30), mission accomplished. Father, I am coming home. And his last word tops his confidence: "Father, into your hands I command my spirit" (Lk 23:46).

## 8. Jesus' temptations to avoid the cross

It is hard for Jesus to suffer and die on the cross. Humanly speaking he had liked to avoid it.

a. Jesus tempted by the devil (Mt 4:4-5 par)

Already the devil had tempted him to forget about that morose idea of the cross. Nobody would follow a crucified founder. He should rather jump down from the temple pinnacle and perform a show miracle, where angels would come and carry him on their hands so that he would not even hurt his toes (Lk 4:9-12). Then all would hail him as a successful leader. But Jesus could only reject the idea because the Father wanted him to redeem mankind by dying on the cross.

b. Jesus tempted by Peter (*Mt* 16:23 par)

And a second time Jesus was tempted to reject the cross. When he foretold his suffering to his disciples Peter took him aside and began to remonstrate with him, "May you be spared, Master!" God forbid that any such thing ever happen to you!" Jesus could only reject the temptation which was basically the temptation of the devil and thus Peter was called a satan.

c. Jesus tempted in the garden of Gethsemani  
(*Lk* 22:41-42)

The Lord has often spoken about his death on the cross. But now that it was close at hand and he tried to say his final "yes" he was tempted to give up. He even sweat blood (*Lk* 22:44). He received the strength to accept the cross, after all, by praying "with great intensity" (*Lk* 22:44), which only Luke, the gospel of prayer tells us.

d. Jesus tempted on the cross  
(*Lk* 4:13; *Jn* 13:27-30)

After the last temptation of Jesus by the devil Luke tells us: "When the devil had finished all the tempting he left him, to await another opportunity" (*Lk* 4:13). when was this other opportunity? Josef Schmid<sup>6</sup> sees in this a clear reference to Christ's suffering as the final attack of the devil. When Jesus at the last supper foretells his betrayal and says: "It's the one to whom I give the bit of food I dip in the dish" (*Jn* 13:26) he gives the morsel to Judas Iscariot. And the evangelist adds: "Immediately after, Satan entered his heart" (*Jn* 13:27). No sooner had Judas eaten the morsel "than he went out. It was sooner night" (*Jn* 13:28), not only outside, but in the heart of Judas.

And now that the Lord is actually hanging on the cross he is able to endure the pains of soul and body only because he prays, making the sentiments of psalm 22 his own sentiments. That psalm was not composed for Jesus. But it expresses the stages of his feeling very well, which from despair to confidence and confidence to despair till finally he dies with deep confidence.

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<sup>6</sup>Das Evangelium nach Lukas. Regensburger neues Testament 3. 4th ed. (Regenburgh: Friedrich Pustet, 1960), p. 105.

## **9. Application for us**

We have to do the same in our life and make the psalms our personal prayer. That we do not learn in one year. It will take us a long time. But we have to try. We will learn by doing it. The psalms are the prayer book of the priest. And the priest shall pray the psalm for the Church, the people of God, the whole world.

## **26th World Communications Day "The Proclamation of Christ's Message in the Communication Media" Sunday 31th May 1992**

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*Pontificium Consilium de Communicationibus Socialibus*

**Dear Brothers and Sisters,**

For the twenty-sixth successive year, in response to a directive given by the Second Vatican Council, the Church celebrates a World Day dedicated to a social communications.

What is it that this Day celebrates? It is a way of acknowledging with gratitude a specific gift of God, a gift which has enormous significance for the period of human history in which we are living, the gift of all those technical means which facilitate, enhance and enrich communications between beings.

On this Day, we celebrate the blessings of speech, of hearing and of sight, which enable us to emerge from our isolation and loneliness in order to exchange with those around us the thoughts and sentiments which arise in our hearts. We celebrate the gifts of writing and reading by which the wisdom of our ancestors is placed at our disposal and our own experience and reflection are passed on to the generations that follow us. Then, as if these wonders were of small account, we recognize the value of "marvels" even more wonderful: "the marvels of technology which God has destined human genius to discover" (*Inter Mirifica*, 1), inventions which in our time have immeasurably increased and extended the range over which our communications may carry and have amplified the volume of our voice so that it can simultaneously come to the ears multitudes beyond counting.

The communications media – and we exclude none of them from our celebration – are the admission ticket of every man and woman to the modern marketplace where thoughts are given public utterance, where ideas are exchanged, new is passed around, and information of all kind is transmitted and received (cf. *Redemptoris Missio*, 37). For all of this we praise our Heavenly Father from whom comes “every good endowment and every perfect gift” (*Jas* 1:17).

Our celebration, while essentially one of gladness and thanksgiving, is of necessity tempered with sadness and regret. By the very media we are celebrating we receive constant reminders of the limitations of our human condition, of the presence of evil in individuals and in society, of the senseless violence and injustice human beings wreak upon one another under so many pretexts. Through the media we often find ourselves in the position of helpless spectators assisting at atrocities committed all over the globe, whether the reason for them be historical rivalries, or racial prejudices, a desire for vengeance, a lust for power, greed for possessions, selfishness, or a lack of respect for human life and human rights. Christians deplore these happenings and motivations. But they are called to do much more; they must endeavor to overcome evil with good (cf. *Rom* 12:21).

The Christian response to evil is, above all, to harken to the Good News and to make God’s message of salvation in Jesus Christ ever more present. Christians have a “good news” to tell. We have Christ’s message – and it is our joy to share it with every man and woman of good will who is prepared to listen.

We tell it first by the witness of our lives, for, as Pope Paul VI wisely said, “modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 41). We are expected to be like a city on a hill, like a lamp on a lampstand, visible to all, our light shining like a beacon signalling the safe channel to a peaceful haven (cf. *Mt* 5:13-14).

When our individuals and community lives exemplify the beliefs and values we profess as Christians, this fact cannot fail to be brought to the attention of the world by all communications media that truly reflect the reality of things. Such a proclamation of Christ’s message can already accomplish great good. How effective

would be such a universal witness on the part of the members of the Church!

But, a still more explicit proclamation is also expected of Christ's followers. We are obliged to proclaim our beliefs "in the light of day" and "from the housetops" (*Mt* 10,27; *Lk* 12,3), without fear or compromise, adapting the divine message, naturally, "to people's way of talking and their patterns of thought" (*Communio et Progressio*, 11), and always with a sensitivity towards their actual beliefs and convictions equal to the sensitivity which we expect from them in regard to our own. Our proclamation must invariably be made with that twofold respect which the Church insists on: respect for all human beings without exception in their quest for answers to the deepest questions of their lives, and respect for the action of the Spirit, already mysteriously present in every human heart (cf. *Relemporis Missio*, 29).

Christ, we remember, forced his teaching on no one. He presented it to all without exclusion, but left each one free to respond to his invitation. This is the pattern which we, his disciples, follow. We claim that all men and women have the right to hear the saving message which he left with us; and we claim for them the right to embrace it if it convinces them. Far from feeling any obligation to apologize for putting Christ's message at the disposal of all, we claim with full conviction that it is our right and obligation to do no less.

There exists a corresponding right and obligation to use for his purpose all the new media of communication which distinguish our times. Indeed "the Church would feel herself guilty before God if she did not avail herself of those powerful instruments which human skill is constantly developing and perfecting" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 45).

It is clearly realized that these "powerful instruments" require specific skills and disciplines on the part of those who use them, and that to communicate intelligibly in these "new languages" there is a need for both special aptitudes and appropriate training.

It is in this connection that on World Communications Day I recall the activities of Catholics, individually and in a myriad of institutions and organizations, in this field. In particular I mention the three great Catholic Media Organizations: the International



Catholic Office for Film and Cinema (OCIC), The International Catholic Press Union (UCIP), and the International Catholic Association for Radio and Television (Unda). It is to them in particular and to the vast resources of professional knowledge, skill and zeal among their extensive international membership that the Church hopefully and confidently turns as she seeks to proclaim Christ's message in a form adapted to the instruments now at her disposal and in language intelligible to the worldwide media-conditioned culture to which it must be addressed.

The great body of Catholic media professionals, lay men and women for the most part, must be reminded on this special day of the awesome responsibility which rests upon them, but they must also be made to feel that they enjoy the spiritual support and firm solidarity of the whole body of the faithful. I wish to encourage them to even greater and more urgent efforts, both to communicate the message through the media and to train others to do so. I appeal to all Catholic organizations, to Religious Congregations and ecclesial movements, but in a special way to Episcopal Conferences, both national and regional, to foster the Church's presence in the media and to work for greater coordination among the Catholic agencies involved. In fulfilling her mission, the Church needs to be able to count on a far-reaching and more effective use of the means of social communication.

May God be the strength and support of all Catholics involved in the world of communications as they re-dedicate themselves to the work which he so clearly requires of them. As a token of his divine presence and of his all-empowering help for their efforts, I gladly impart to them my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 24 January 1992, Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.

## **Decision at the Crossroads (Pastoral Letter on Election)**

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CBCP

*"Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths and where the best road is. Walk in it, and you will live in peace."*

(Jer. 6:16)

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

We are approaching a crossroads in our national history, the May 11, 1992 Elections. For the third time, we your bishops write to you to assist you to participate responsibly in this event. In our first letter of July 22, 1991, we urged the education of voters to enable them to vote wisely. We denounced the politics of guns, goons and gold. We ask you to organize and band together to prevent election irregularities. On November 28, 1991 we issued a second letter indicating some guidelines for the wise choice of candidates. With the same pastoral concern which moved us to write you these first two letters, we now address you this third letter, the fruit of extensive consultation and prayerful reflection among ourselves.

### **Where We Are Now**

We see many *encouraging signs* in our political landscape: The emergence of a growing number of organizations promoting voters' education and honest elections, like: the Parish Pastoral Council for Responsible Voting (PPC-RV), Citizens' Movement for Peaceful Elections (CIMPEL), People's Election Watch

(PEW), NASSA-CARE, GUTS, MAHAL '92 and NAMFREL; the people's enthusiastic response to these movements; a more credible COMELEC; members of the board of inspectors with proven fidelity; the PNP and AFP striving to enforce the ban on guns and body guards; the new awareness of the poor that God's power is in them and that they are active agents shaping history; the increasing number of worthy people with little financial resources and not belonging to political parties who present themselves as fresh alternatives to the old politics.

We can sense the renewing breath of the Spirit of God in these and similar developments.

But there are *evil winds* that blow counter to the Spirit's movement: the persistence and worsening of the politics of pay-offs, patronage and personalities; cynicism, and apathy towards the elections; a bandwagon mentality among the voters who will vote for the likely winner rather than for the most qualified; the continuing existence of private armies and arms smuggling; the alleged threats of extortion by the NPA from candidates.

The presence of these countervailing forces reveals a deep crisis in our history. The Lord bids us to turn this crisis into a national breakthrough.

### Where We Should Go

And we will, if we see our struggle for a renewed political order as a struggle of faith, which we personally and as Church's must wage in pursuit of our Christian vocation and the Church's mission. We bring to this struggle deep faith-convictions.

We believe that God who in former times acted to free his people and has offered us fulness of life in the Spirit through His Son, Jesus Christ, is with us still. He remains faithful though we have been unfaithful to Him.

Our God is present in a special way in the poor and powerless. He who "chose the world's lowborn and despised to reduce to nothing those who were something" (1 Cor. 1:28) continues to do the same today.

But He will lift us up (*Hos.* 11:1) only if we turn to Him. The very abject situation we are in is a call to conversion to us as individuals and as a people. In a democracy a people gets the leaders it deserves. The qualities of our leaders are often a reflection of our qualities as people. Our public officials symbolize the values of the people who elect them. A crooked people will vote crooked candidates into office. A God-fearing people will vote for God-fearing candidates. The fact that we are often reduced to a choice for a lesser of two evils among candidates is itself a telling commentary on our sad state as a people. We have many unworthy politicians because we have tolerated and even connived with evil especially during election times.

We should turn God. We must repent!

### Steps We Must Take

We must set our priorities aright. Honor and dignity before money (*Prov.* 22:1); service before power; the common good before egoistic or small-group-centered self-interest; the nation before personal relations and *utang na loob*.

From a repentant people will arise God's gift of renewed leaders. Then we will choose correctly the men and women whom God wishes to vest with authority (*Rom.* 13:1), and who will lead us out of our deplorable situation. Our votes are an expression of our own conversation and will be decisive for our country's future. A vote for good leaders will be a choice for our people's fuller life.

Who are these persons we must choose? It is not our task or competence as your bishops to name specifically those you must vote for. We have, however, indicated some requisite qualities in our November 28, 1991 pastoral letter. Other Church groups have elaborated more extensive guidelines which can also help voters make a wise choice. But here we wish to simply point out our need to elect competent, committed leaders of integrity we can be truly proud of whom we can present to the young as models worthy of emulation.

We appeal to the different candidates to obey the laws of God and of the land in their campaign and election activities. We ask

them not to buy votes. Vote-buying is not only immoral, but is also an insult to the poor and retards our country's development. We urge them to sign a covenant committing themselves to an issue-oriented campaign and to collaborate towards free, honest and peaceful elections.

We ask the COMELEC, the PNP and AFP, the members of the board of election inspectors, and all who are called to serve in the elections to carry out their tasks with continuing fidelity and courage. Your loyalty is to God and the people and to no one else.

We ask the NPA not to obstruct the flow of the democratic process by demanding money from candidates. Such extortion, if true, perpetuates corruption and diminishes the people's freedom of choice.

We ask business people to support and to help fund organizations that work for meaningful, honest and peaceful elections, and even to join such organizations.

We call on all mass media practitioners to serve the truth at all times and not partisan political interests. We ask for objectivity in reporting and fairness in commentary. We ask them to report news and not to concoct it.

We appeal to our schools to exert efforts to guide our youth both in and out of school towards meaningful participation in the electoral process, and to make their facilities available as polling places, when needed.

We urge the different parishes and dioceses to organize as quickly as possible the PPC-RV or similar groups, and to support already existing ones. We also urge the Church-based groups and other organizations to continue their educational and organizational activities and to establish linkages with one another. Specifically, we urge them to list the promises of candidates and to monitor later fulfillment or non-fulfillment.

And we ask you all, our people, to exercise unremitting effort and unflagging vigilance to make sure that your right and duty to vote is used wisely for choosing persons who seek public office, not to be served but to serve, not to secure their vested

interests but to give life to the people even at the cost of personal sacrifice (*Mt.* 20:26-28; *Lk.* 22:27). If you can, volunteer to become members of the board of election inspectors.

Do not sell your votes. To do so is to offend God, to betray your country and to sell your dignity and future to shameless scoundrels.

To show our repentance and to obtain for our people the grace to choose wisely our public officials on free, honest and orderly elections, we urge you to join us in a crusade of prayer and fasting. The election evils of our nation can be driven out only by such means (*Mk.* 9:29; *Mt.* 17:21). Let us conduct prayer vigils and set the Fridays of Lent not only as days of abstinence but also of fasting. We ask parishes and small Christian communities to hold on May 8-10, 1992 a triduum of prayer.

### **Our Challenge**

The coming elections are crucial to our future. They will become what we singly and together want them to be, work and sacrifice for them to be. They can become either another missed opportunity or the best elections we have ever had. They can signal the first orderly and peaceful transfer of power in our country after almost thirty years, or they can trigger national instability. They can be giant step forward or a demoralizing setback. Let us not fail our country. Let us be true to our best selves. Together let us build a better future, which will be ours if we choose well our leaders. Our strenght is in God and in our solidarity.

Let us heed the call of the Lord: *"Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths and where the best road is. Walk in it, and you will live in peace"* (*Jer.* 6:16).

May the Virgin Mary who watches with maternal care over our country and whom we honor in the election month of May, obtain from her Son the grace we need to make and carry out decisions in this moment of the Lord.

# Renewing the Political Order

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CBCP

## Official CBCP Pastoral Guidelines on Choosing Candidates for the 1992 Elections

*"But choose from the people at large  
some capable and God-fearing persons,  
trustworthy and incorruptible,  
and appoint them as leaders of the people . . ."*

(Ex. 18:21).

### Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The selection of new political leaders confronts our citizens with a reality that could lead either to a crisis born of despair or to a challenge illumined by hope.

As the spiritual pastors of our faithful, aware of our God-given responsibility to help form consciences (*Deut. 17; 8-13*), we place ourselves on the side of hope. It is our prayerful hope that the political parties will choose for their standard bearers, men and women, who are characterized as "of good reputation, who are wise and full of the Spirit" (*Acts 6:3*). We also place our hope in the courage and wisdom of our citizens who, in 1992, will elect our political representatives.

Because we do not wish this hope to turn into disillusionment, because we desire to strengthen our democratic ethos and to widen the horizons of peace and unity among our citizens, we, your bishops, have decided to offer guidelines for the selection of our political candidates.

To avoid misinterpretations, we wish to make clear at the outset that the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, through this Pastoral Letters, officially endorses no political party, supports no particular candidate, and favors no political platform. We assert our respect for the healthy ideological pluralism that should characterized our multi-party systems and, above all, we confirm the freedom of all our citizens, of whatever faith, to make their political choices in the light of their consciences.

We should also note, that the ethical guidelines we present here regarding the essential qualifications of candidates, come from the collective discernment and wisdom of the laity, clergy, religious and Bishops who participated in the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines. They were men and women who came from every corner of our country and who endorsed and articulated the values of *maka-Diyos, maka-tao, and maka-bayan*.

Out of this basic values, we can deduce the following desirable qualifications for political candidates:

1. *The candidate must have pursued, with persistency and consistency, the common good.*

The beloved Pope John XXIII, in his major Encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth), stated that "the whole reason for existence of civil authorities is the realization of the common good" (No. 55). By common good we mean particularly those common goods which the individual needs but cannot assure for himself such as the integrity of our environment, peace and order, participation, defense of human rights, a dynamic economy. The new breed of politicians must then be defined as those imbued with uncommon moral courage to transcend vested interests, whether of one's party or family. They must not utilize political positions to pave the way for nepotism, graft and corruption.



2. *The candidate must have been a vigorous defender and promoter of justice.*

Justice, if faithfully implemented, can remove many of the causes of our social conflicts. This has been echoed by the 17th Philippine Business Conference whose Position Paper stated: "One cannot expect or demand peace and order so long as the majority of the people as the majority of the people are poor and deprived of access to social services and adequate incomes. The issue of social justice must be addressed both directly and indirectly." Thus, the cry for social justice is a universal expectation among all sectors of our people. We call for *maka-tao-type* politicians who are not self-centered, who can work together with a team in order to draw up programs for eliminating injustices which have become embedded within our social systems. Moreover, given the high level of violence in our society, candidates must be committed to the defense of life and its sacredness in all its stages, starting with the unborn.

3. *The candidate must be imbued with the maka-Diyos spirit of service.*

Service is *maka-Diyos* when marked by humility after the example of the Lord Jesus Who came to serve and not to be served. It cannot be genuine service when it is done in arrogance and domination. Thus, the candidate must have the firm will to enter the path of reforming whatever in our bureaucracy, in our military and police forces, and in our judiciary and legislative systems are prone to diminish the freedom of our citizenry and to interfere in the legitimate pursuit of their livelihood.

4. *The candidate must possess an enduring and preferential option for the poor.*

Love for the dispossessed poor, victims often of structural injustice, is akin to that of God Whom Scriptures describe as the defender and liberator of the poor. The Lord Jesus Himself with their hardships and sufferings. Our people expect the new *maka-bayan* politicians to live without ostentation, to be close to the poor in order to derive first-hand knowledge of their problems and to support their efforts to attain economic self-

reliance. Their solidarity with the poor will give them the determination to defend the human rights of our citizens.

5. *The candidate must have the necessary competence to effectively perform those tasks and responsibilities required by our laws.*

Politics in an imperfect democracy like the Philippines, is an intricate task. For example, it requires skills to reform the tax system, and to insure basic services such as education, housing and health. It demands the professional competence which can stabilize our macroeconomic environment as well as ensure the conditions of peace and order which enable our citizens to go about their daily life without fear and harassment. Thus, a candidate's outstanding achievements in a specialized profession do not necessarily translate into competence in politics.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, the list of desirable qualities in a political candidates which we have presented, is far from exhaustive. Through your own discernment and prayers, other valuable qualities can be identified and included as criteria for choosing appropriate candidates. It is only right and proper that you, the faithful, should take the responsibility likewise, especially in the social and political sphere which belongs to your apostolate by virtue of your baptism in Christ.

You must now assume full responsibility to heal our political system. You must now have the courage to make the State fully accountable to its citizens. You must be a people with a spiritual vision to animate our citizens to vote only for those candidates who are truly *maka-Diyos, maka-tao, and maka-bayan*. For, in truth, it is the citizens, with their inalienable rights, who empower the States and its politicians, and not the other way around, as has become the fashion today to claim that it is the State that empowers citizens.

We, therefore, urge all members of God's people, to enter into a period of prayer and discernment in order to fulfill their crucial duty of choosing a new breed of politicians.

We likewise appeal to all political parties to heed our citizens' expectations regarding the selection of their party standard bear-

ers. The coming elections present the various political parties with a historic opportunity to place politics at the service of our people and to return nobility and honesty in the public office. To let this opportunity slip by without their initiatives to renew the political order by choosing men and women worthy of our nation, is to court not only the deepening disillusionment of Filipinos, but also their justified anger.

We look with hope to the future. As a citizenry, we are on a pilgrimage of faith towards a new Philippines. To attain this goal, we shall need the guidance and strength which can only come from God. Let us take courage and remain steadfast - for He is by our side. Who said, "Behold I make all things new" (*Rev.* 21:5).

Manila, 28 November 1991.

## First Norms on General Absolution

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*Excelso Garcia, O.P.*

6. The Church's tradition shows that the first faithful used to confess their sins before the Eucharistic celebration. We read in the *Didache* (of the second century): "In your meetings on Sundays let you break the Bread with thanksgiving, after confessing your sins, so that your Sacrifice be acceptable." Most probably this manner of confessing sins before the Eucharist service, was what has been called "public absolutions" or "public confessions," a sort of preparatory ritual of the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which existed in the Church since ancient times and continue up to the present, something like our initial penitential part of the Holy Mass, where the celebrating priest and the whole congregation recite the "I confess to Almighty God..." and then the priest alone says: "May the Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins and bring us to everlasting life," to which the people answer: "Amen."

If, as some authors sustain, this is the case, this kind of confession could refer only to sins not necessarily be declared in the *Sacrament of Confession*. It was, therefore, not a substitute for the *individual sacramental confession*.

However, this does not mean in any way that in the primitive Church there was no sacramental reconciliation. St. Augustine (354-430), for instance, says: "The peace of the Church forgives sins, and separation from the Church's peace retains sins... The time for penance is appointed that satisfaction may be made to the Church in which sins are forgiven. For outside the Church there is no

remission of sins." And he exhorted to his clergy to remain at their posts, emphasizing both the sacramental character of confession as well as its necessity: "If priest are lacking, how great will be the doom that awaits those who leave this life laden with sins."

7. There have always existed conditions or situations when persons, unable to make individual sacramental confession, could be imparted the sacramental absolution. Moralists mention the case of deaf-mutes who cannot declare their sins for not having at hand a priest who can understand their sign language; or persons who do not know the language of the country where they work or reside; or persons who, having started their confession, cannot complete it. Obviously these persons can have a true and real desire to confess in order to obtain the forgiveness of their sins, but they cannot carry out their oral sacramental confession. Undoubtedly, they can be imparted the sacramental absolution and, thus, their sins can be remitted.

8. A new and different situation showed itself during the two World Wars in our century. Thousands of persons, military, prisoners and civilians, were frequently exposed to a real danger of death before a battle started and during air raids over cities and towns far away from the battle field. This urgent situations called for imparting in anticipation *general absolution* to those people who could not make individual sacramental confession. Considering this kind of situation of the past, we can at this point define *general absolution* as "the anticipation of sacramental absolution granted to a group of persons who, under the stress of an urgent and grave necessity cannot, without fault of their own, confess sacramentally their sins at the moment, and need to be absolved."

9. By allowing the imparting of sacramental absolution in such circumstances the Church respects the divine right, given to her with regard to the administration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation, and at the same time gives the souls necessary spiritual assistance. The Church's right is limited, and it should be exercised in conformity with her actual knowledge of this right's limitations, according to the Lord's will. She can and must deepen and further her knowledge about her right, but she cannot and must not go beyond it or change it. The Church's actuation has to be always a service to souls according to God's will. Hence, the duty of the Church is to make

God's grace and mercy accessible to men in such a way that no real conflict between God's will and human needs arises. Pleasing man's demands against the will of God would mean betraying her divine mission, and the Church knows only too well that being unfaithful to the Lord for listening to human claims and demands can never be a true service to man at all.

10. Pope Pius XII, conscious of the power granted to the Church by the Lord and aware of the serious spiritual need of many Christian faithful threatened by danger of death during the last World War, granted in 1939 the following faculty: "Given the threat or pursuance of battle. . . , it is licit for priests to absolve military personnel from any censure and sin, even reserved and publicly known, through a general form or *collective absolution*, without previous confession, but only after they have properly made an act of contrition, if each penitent cannot be heard in sacramental confession due to the number of military personnel or lack of time" (AAS, 1939, pp. 70 ff).

11. After using the foregoing faculty for one year, a new circumstance appeared which seemed not to be covered by the papal grant. Sometimes the circumstances were such that it was morally impossible or very difficult to impart general absolution collectively to the military personnel by groups. Thus, the Sacred Penitentiary was consulted in 1940 on the case. The answer given was as follows: "In such circumstances, it is licit, according to the principles of Moral Theology, to *absolve collectively* military personnel, by groups, at once, when the serious necessity appears to be real. The priests who will impart the general absolution should not omit to inform the penitents that the absolution thus given would not produce any salutary effect unless they be well disposed and resolve to make an integral confession in due time" (S. Apostolic Penitentiary, April 10, 1940: AAS, 1940, p. 371).

12. Reading carefully both the faculty granted by Pius XII to impart general absolution and the answer of the Sacred Penitentiary, we can say the following:

a. *With regard to the priest:* the faculty was given to all priests, even without jurisdiction to hear confessions. Any priest could impart general absolution to military personnel by groups, from any censures and sins. He had to inform the penitents before

being absolved that all should make an act of contrition and those in mortal sins were bound to confess them in due time in order to receive the salutary effect of general absolution.

b. *With regard to the penitents:* the faculty considered the military personnel, threatened by danger of death during the war hostilities. They had to be well disposed by making an act of contrition, and those guilty of mortal sins were bound to confess them in due time in an individual integral confession.

c. *With regard to the circumstances justifying the general absolution:* the faculty could be used only when the attack was imminent and during the war hostilities. When it was impossible or very difficult to impart general absolution collectively in those circumstances, the faculty could be used as soon as the serious necessity to impart it seemed to be real. In places not affected by such danger and in time of peace the faculty could not be used.

13. The same Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary issued on March 25, 1944 (AAS, 1944, pp. 155-156) an Instruction on *general absolution to be imparted to many persons*, in order to dissipate some doubts and solve some difficulties on the interpretation of the faculty to give general absolution collectively. The main points clarified in said Instruction were the following:

I. All priests could impart general absolution:

a. to military personnel whenever the attack was threatening and during the actual fighting, constituting a *danger of death*, and given that each penitent could not confess due to the great number of penitents or lack of time. If circumstances were such that it was morally impossible or very difficult to absolve them when attack was imminent or during battle, then it was licit to absolve them as soon as the necessity was real.

b. to civilians as well as military personnel in *danger of death* during the fighting or battle.

II. Outside of danger of death, it was not licit to impart sacramental absolution to a group of persons collectively, by reason of a big gathering of penitents alone, as it could happen on a day

of great solemnity or indulgence; it was licit, however, if there was a serious and urgent necessity, proportionate to the gravity of making an integral and individual confession imposed by divine law, as when penitents, through no personal fault, would otherwise be deprived of sacramental grace and Holy Communion for a long time.

It belonged to the local Ordinaries to judge whether the great number of soldiers, prisoners or civilians were in such a need. Priests, therefore, must have had recourse to the local Ordinary, whenever this was possible, in order to give this kind of absolution.

III. To impart collectively sacramental absolution arbitrarily outside of danger of death, as explained in n. I, or without the license of the local Ordinary when a recourse to him was possible, as stated in n. II, was to be considered an abuse.

IV. Before imparting general absolution, the priests should inform the Christian faithful, if circumstances allowed, the following things:

a. the necessity of making an act of contrition for the sins committed and to be determined not to sin again. It was convenient that the priests require the penitents to show their sorrow externally, if possible, for instance by striking their breast.

b. the strict obligation of those who received general absolution to confess in their next sacramental confession all mortal sins, not yet confessed.

V. Priests had to clearly inform the faithful that they were seriously forbidden to evade the fulfillment of the obligation mentioned in n. VI b, i. e., to confess the mortal sins, not yet confessed before, in their next sacramental confession, by seeking another occasion to receive general absolution. Both divine and ecclesiastical laws impose a serious obligation to make an integral sacramental confession of all mortal sins not yet confessed.

VI. Local Ordinaries had to call the attention of priests regarding their serious obligation to observe these norms whenever they were allowed to use the faculty to impart general absolution.



VII. In imparting general absolution its usual whole form in plural number should be used, if time allowed; otherwise the shorter form is sufficed: "I absolve you from all censures and sins in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

14. Summing up, the Instruction of the Sacred Penitentiary of 1944 reaffirmed in n.I what Pius XII had clearly granted in 1939, together with the clarification given by the S. Penitentiary in 1940. However, in n. II the Instruction contained a very important observation: "*outside of danger of death*, general absolution could not be licitly imparted, for the simple reason of having a big gathering of penitents alone." This prohibition appears in our Codex, c. 961, § 1, n. 2. However, general absolution could be licitly imparted when a *serious and urgent necessity*, proportionate to the gravity of making an integral confession, imposed by divine and ecclesiastical laws, existed, and great number of penitents would be deprived, through no fault of their own, of the sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time. It belonged to the local Ordinaries to judge if such and grave necessity existed or not. Priests should get a license from the local Ordinary in order to impart general absolution, if they could contact him. To impart general absolution arbitrarily, *outside of danger of death*, or *without existing serious or grave necessity*, or without the license from the local Ordinary was considered as an abuse. Obviously our canon 961 is a reproduction of norm n. II.

*With regards to the priests:* they could not impart on their own initiative general absolution *outside of danger of death*. Even in case of a *serious and grave necessity* they needed the license of the local Ordinary, if the latter could be contacted. Before imparting the general absolution, the priest had to exhort the penitents to make an act of contrition. He had also to warn seriously those who were in mortal sin not to evade their obligation to confess it by seeking another opportunity to receive general absolution.

*With regards to the penitents:* general absolution could be imparted to military personnel *only* when an attack was imminent and during the battle; to military personnel and civilians in danger of death. In case of *serious and grave necessity* general absolution was also allowed. Before general absolution they should make an act of contrition. Those who were conscious of mortal sin were seriously

bound to confess it in individual confession as soon as possible, and were seriously forbidden to evade this obligation by seeking again an occasion to receive another general absolution. These contents are similar to those of can. 962 and 963 of our Codex.

## Cases and Inquiries

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*Excelso Garcia, O.P. and Fausto Gomez, O.P.*

### I. Supplying Faculty of the Church

*It is with high esteem for your publication that I humbly refer to you and your staff the following questions for consultation and, should you deem these relevant, also for their subsequent publication. The questions are very much related to each other but I have to separate them for the sake of clarity (I hope so):*

1. *Can we be certain enough that the Church's treasury of grace complements, supersedes or remedies (whichever is the more accurate term):*
  - a. *the invalidity of certain ministerial acts performed by ordained ministers?*
  - b. *the illicit performance of certain ministerial functions?*
  - c. *the incapacity of the non-ordained who simulates the celebration of a sacrament without prejudice to canonical sanctions? Is the Church able to supply grace for the sake of the faithful who attend a simulated "sacrament"?*
2. *Is the ecclesia supplet principle jurisdictional in nature and hence operative in cases such as a visiting priest who, despite not having the faculty to hear confession, absolves a penitent in the place where he is temporarily staying (cf. can. 966)?*

3. *What of the sacraments performed in no extraordinary circumstances by a priest suspended a divinis? Invalid? Valid but illicit? Is ecclesia supplet applicable in this case?*

4. *What of the "sacraments" celebrated by a priest whose ordination was later declared invalid by a competent tribunal? Is ecclesia supplet applicable in this case for the sake of the faithful who attended the ministerial celebrations prior to the declaration of the invalidity of the ordination of that priest?*

A Deacon

The consultant speaks of the "Church's treasury of grace." I have always heard of the "Church's treasure." Such treasure consists in the accumulation of the supererogatory (more than sufficient) merits of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and all the Saints, administered by the Church to pay for the temporal punishment due to sins both committed and remitted by men. This is the doctrine of indulgences and their value. It is based on the dogma of the Mystical Body of Christ and the Communion of Saints. All members of the Church help one another in their needs. This treasure is administered by the Church. The questions posed by the consultant cannot be answered by the principles involved in this dogma. For they regard different matters.

1a. Thus, the consultant believes that the purpose of the Church's treasury is to "supply grace" in cases that sacraments become invalid for deficiencies of the minister who performs them. Valid sacraments confer grace *ex opere operato*. Invalid sacraments do not confer any grace. Can the Church "supply grace" out of her treasure? This seems to be the consultant's first question in letter a. The answer is in the negative. What is involved is the prerogative of God alone, source and origin of divine grace. The Church did not institute the sacraments. Jesus Christ, true God and true man, has instituted them all. The Church has been entrusted with the administration of the sacraments.

Hence, if the acts referred to by the consultant are concerning the sacraments, the Church may neither complement, nor supersede, not remedy deficiencies, so as to render valid what is invalid. If a validly ordained priest does not use the valid matter or if he

substantially changes the words of consecration, the Church can do nothing in order to validate an invalid Mass, nor "supply the grace" which the invalid Mass was supposed to produce in souls. God alone will certainly reward those who innocently participated in the invalid Mass or made an offering for it. Likewise, if a confessor absolves a penitent without even hearing his confession, when it could be made, or knowing that the penitent is unworthy, the Church cannot make that confession valid or grant the penitent the grace he would expect to receive in a true confession. Such validation is beyond the power of the Church. The Church's treasure has nothing to do with correcting these human deficiencies, mentioned by the consultant. An act of the kind mentioned will always be invalid. Its invalidity consists in that the divine law has been transgressed, not merely an ecclesiastical law.

1b. The illicit performance of certain acts done by an ordained priest will always be illicit. Distributing Holy Communion without using the stole or celebrating the Holy Mass without observing the Eucharistic fast or the rubrics established for its celebration will always be illicit and unlawful. How can these illicit performances be rendered licit? The only thing that the Church can do is to dispense before performing the act, from certain ecclesiastical requirement necessary for the act's licitness.

1c. If a layman shams being a priest and simulates the performance of a sacrament which requires priestly ordination, for instance saying Mass or hearing confession, such acts will always be invalid. God surely will take into account the good disposition or devout participation of the sincere faithful and help them by ways and plans of His own; but the Church can do nothing about invalidity. She cannot as it were mechanically or automatically "supply the grace" the faithful have not received because the unordained "celebrant" has simulated the sacraments involved.

2. In answer to the second question, Yes. The Church can supply human deficiencies, because the power of order exists in the person performing the act. The consultant implies that the visiting priest has no faculty to hear confessions. In such case the only thing lacking is the necessary faculty to exercise the power of order, which faculty is within the competence of the Church. She therefore can supply what is lacking in the priest performing the act. But let us not

assume that a visiting priest has no faculty to hear confessions for the very fact of being a visiting priest. That is not correct. Canon 967 clearly states: "Those who have the faculty habitually to hear confessions, either by virtue of their office or by virtue of a concession by the Ordinary of either the place of incardination or that in which they have a domicile, can exercise that faculty everywhere, unless in a particular case the local Ordinary has refused, without prejudice to the provisions of can. 974, § § 2 and 3."

The sacrament of penance is a special sacrament. We have to distinguish in the confessor two different things necessary for performing his office validly, namely: the power of order received in his ordination as priest and the faculty to hear confessions given by the Church. Canon 966 § 1 reads as follows: "For the valid absolution of sins, it is required that, in addition to the power of order, the minister has the faculty to exercise that power in respect to the faithful to whom he gives absolution." The power of order, of divine origin, gives the capacity to absolve from sins; the faculty to exercise this power or jurisdiction enables the priest to exercise validly the power of order. Without the power of order there is no minister. A layman, for instance, cannot be minister of this sacrament since he has not received the power of order. Likewise, without jurisdiction or faculty to hear confessions there is no subject or penitent to be absolved. The Church in giving the faculty to hear confessions may restrict or limit such faculty to a certain group of persons or to a place or to a period of time. Hence a priest who has no faculty to hear confessions cannot hear confessions validly at all. The power of order, of divine origin, is received only through a valid ordination; the faculty to hear confessions is given by the Church, either by law or by concession of the competent authority. Both are essential and necessary for the validity of absolution given by the confessor.

We have to bear in mind that the sacrament of penance is likened to a judgment. No confessor can remit or absolve offenses against God without knowing what these offenses are, and without knowing the worthiness of the penitent to receive absolution. Only in danger of death can a validly ordained priest without jurisdiction absolve a penitent without hearing his confession, assuming the penitent is well disposed (can. 976).

Note that the so called suspension a divinis is not mentioned

any longer in the new Codex. Suspension of the power of order does not divest the person validly ordained of the power of order; suspension only prohibits its exercise either totally or partially, according to whatever the law or precept threatening or imposing the suspension states (can. 1334). Note that suspension prohibits only (*it does not invalidate*) the exercise of the power of order. Acts of the power of order performed in spite of the *suspension* are valid, but illicit. Moreover, can. 1335 says: "If the censure (suspension) prohibits the celebration of sacraments. . . , the prohibition is suspended (*not absolved or remitted*) whenever it is necessary to provide for the faithful who are in danger of death; if the *latae sententiae* censure (*suspension*) has not been declared, the prohibition is also suspended (*not absolved or remitted*) whenever one of the faithful request a sacrament. . . ; for a just cause it is lawful to make a request."

4. The Church cannot supply invalid Masses or reconciliations presided over by a person whose ordination has been declared invalid. God surely will provide in cases of these deficiencies; the Church, however, cannot remedy such invalid acts with her supplying faculty or power. As we said before, the Church can supply only in cases of her own competence, i.e., in cases within her governing area, not in cases concerning the power of order.

## II. Transfer from One Religious Institute to Another

*There is a nun belonging to a congregation of diocesan right. She left the convent for she did not like the congregation any longer. She wants to enter another congregation, let us say a more severe congregation like the contemplative orders. However, the superior-founder of the congregation does not allow her to do that, namely to enter another congregation or order. Does the superior-founder have a right to do that, to forbid her to enter another congregation?*

*The woman concerned would appreciate your help in answering the question.*

*A Priest*

The case deals with a sister belonging to a congregation of diocesan right, who "left the convent for she did not like the congregation any longer."

"She left the convent." This phrase can mean different things or situations that require different solutions. We suppose the consultant means that she left the congregation according to the norms of the Code of Canon Law. The law contemplates different situations. When the time of temporal profession has expired, the religious is free to leave the congregation (can. 688, § 1). During the time of temporal vows the religious can obtain an indult to leave the congregation from the Supreme Moderator with the consent of his/her council and this indult has to be confirmed by the Bishop where the house of the religious is located (can. 688, § 2). If the religious has pronounced his or her perpetual vows, the religious can leave the congregation only after sending his or her petition to the Supreme Moderator of the congregation who, with his or her own opinion and that of the council, must endorse it to the Bishop of the house where he/she is assigned, in order to obtain the indult for the departure (can. 691).

If the sister concerned left the congregation following the foregoing steps, it is surprising that "the Superior-founder of the congregation does not allow her to enter another congregation more severe like a contemplative order." The sister left already the house (congregation, we understand). The Superior-founder cannot refuse or forbid her to enter another congregation. The only thing which the Superior-founder can and must do is to send the pertinent information to the Superior of the congregation to which the sister applies, so that the Superior of the latter congregation with her council may judge about her qualifications to be admitted or not (can. 645, § 2). Note that the sister concerned can validly be admitted to the new congregation, as long as she does not conceal her previous incorporation to another congregation (can. 643, nn. 3 and 5).

It is possible that the sister with perpetual vows, being not satisfied with the religious life of the congregation of diocesan right to which she belongs, has declared her desire and intention to transfer to the Superior founder and the latter "refuses to allow her to transfer to another more severe congregation like the contemplative orders." If such is the case, the norm of canon 684 should be followed. In order to transfer, she needs the "approval of the Supreme Moderators of both congregations to be given with the consent of their respective councils."

In this latter case, if the Superior-founder refuses to give his or her approval for the transfer, the religious of a congregation of



diocesan right can inform about this refusal to the Bishop of the house where she is assigned. He is the one who gives the indult for the departure (can. 691), so he will decide what to do.

EXCELSO GARCIA, O.P.

### III. On Death Penalty

*Recently, I read a column, written by a priest, in a daily newspaper in favor of the re-imposition of the death penalty for some heinous crimes.*

*From this column, I remember three striking propositions, namely: (1) Capital punishment is sanctioned by natural law; (2) The Church has no "official" stand on the issue; (3) The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines might change its opposition to the death penalty and defend it for some very grave crimes.*

*I am a little perplexed on the matter. Could you enlighten me concerning those three propositions? Thank you very much!*

*A Catholic Lay Woman*

1. Is the death penalty sanctioned by natural law? I do not think so. At most, it may be sanctioned by a particular understanding of natural law; but, in general (even for most of those who are in favor of capital punishment), it is sanctioned by human social laws. Be that as it may, with a growing number of persons throughout the world, I believe that the death penalty is against human dignity and the most basic human right, that is, the right to life. Moreover, the wide movement of non-violence (a sign of our times) is also for the abolition of capital punishment: to get out from the circle of violence of our world, we have to shun violence, including the death penalty.

2. My absolute opposition to the imposition of the death penalty stems mainly from my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Is it true that the Church has no official stand? Today, the Church—I believe—is against the death penalty. Through the Vatican Commission of "Justice and Peace," the Church is campaigning for the total abolition of the death penalty. What is more significant for us

Catholics, Pope John Paul II is also against capital punishment. Two texts from our Holy Father: "The inner imperative of the moral conscience enjoins us to respect, protect and promote human life, from the womb to the deathbed, for individuals and peoples, but especially for the weak, the destitute, the derelict" (Concluding Address at Assisi, October 27, 1986); "The right to life (is) the most basic and fundamental right and the condition for all other personal rights... The human being is entitled to such right, in every phase of development, from conception until natural death; and in every condition, whether healthy or sick, whole or handicapped, rich or poor" (*Christifideles Laici*, No. 38).

Likewise, many local churches, through their National Conferences of Bishops, have come out officially with letters against the death penalty. I have read the pertinent texts from the French (1978), the Canadian (1978), the United States (1980), the Brazilian (1991) Hierarchies. Needless to say that many theologians and Christians are also absolutely opposed to the death penalty as an unjust punishment.

3. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) is also against capital punishment. In 1979, when the death penalty was still legal in the Philippines, CBCP endorsed Bill No. 543 entitled "An Act of Abolishing the Death Penalty." CBCP stated then: "We refuse to take refuge in death penalty as the only effective and morally possible means to safeguard the life and well-being of our community and of our citizens. This refusal... is, we believe, a step forward in the evangelical purification of conscience in favor of respect for life."

Archbishop Nestor Cariño, CBCP Secretary General, said in August 1991: "the Church's stand is in consonance with the spirit of the Gospel and of Jesus Christ." CBCP, therefore, is for the abolition of the death penalty and not for its re-imposition at all.

I am against death penalty in all cases, because I strongly defend a coherent ethics of life. Hence, I am against abortion, euthanasia, the offensive war — and capital punishment. Our God is a compassionate God, the God of life, the Living One (*Dt* 5:23; *Ac* 14:15), and Jesus Christ, the Son of God, "the life" (*Jn* 14:5-6), who became one of us so that we may have life (*Jn* 10:10). My faith tells me that we are children of God, brothers and sisters of Christ and in Christ of one another.

If the other person is a brother or a sister in Christ, my brother and sister — God is our Father —, how can I want his or her death? I cannot imagine Jesus Christ as favoring capital punishment. He continues telling us today: "It was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'; but I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (*Mt 5:43-44*).

Of course, we are also for justice — and just punishment; but not for capital punishment. We are for life imprisonment for some heinous crimes. Definitely, we are in compassionate solidarity with the victims of criminals and terrorists.

God alone is the author of life and death; we are stewards of human life. God said: "I take pleasure not in the death of a wicked man, but in the turning back of a wicked man who changes his ways to win life" (*Ez 33:11*).

FAUSTO GOMEZ, O.P.

## **Homilies for May and June 1992**

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Roman Carter, O.P.

### **Third Sunday of Easter May 3, 1992**

Readings: 1st        Acts 5,27b-30 & 40b-41  
              2nd        Rev 5, 11-14  
              Gospel Jn 21, 1-9

Today is traditionally called Good Shepherd Sunday though the shepherding in the Gospel in this year of the cycle of readings is the participative and delegated role of Peter handed on by the Risen Christ. It is curious that in dedications of institutions and communities to our Lord as "Good Shepherd" destitution or moral depravity play an almost unconscionable role. If we want to minister to "down and outs" or to reform prostitutes we call our place "Good Shepherd". However, not only is Christ the Shepherd of *all* his flock, he deposes his guiding office and role to Peter, the Apostles, their successors and all Christian leaders down through the ages, everywhere. And the central function of Christ's Church in evangelization, catechesis, sacramental encounter and spiritual formation always has been and cannot but remain *pastoral*.

In the first reading we find Peter as portrayed by Luke in Acts standing not before sheep but wolves. To the faithless temple priesthood Peter bears witness to Christ's resurrection as a work of God for salvation and forgiveness. To the Sanhedrin he extols obedience to God and his plan as above and before all

considerations of mere human respectability. Thus Peter exercises his office as both vicar and lieutenant of Christ. And witness of the type he gives will be demanded of true Christians (and thus of us) at all times and in all places.

The second reading with paradox typical of the late Judaism from which the author of the Apocalypse came makes the Shepherd God's lamb. The image is redolent enough of Johannine parlance to belie further comment. But the import of the message is that Christ by his death has won in his human nature both new power and new reasons for being the object of universal worship given by myriads of elevated angels and redeemed men. Precisely because he is the lamb once slain Jesus can assume his role from heaven of pastor of all.

The gospel (as is so often the case) transcends the somewhat abstracted cries for obedience and worship of the first two readings with a scene mellowly combining the stern and the tender aspects of Christ and the gullible but sincere openness of Peter. Such a scene is, of course, an encounter. But it is an encounter aimed at permanent and ever-deepening relationship. And that is Good News, indeed!

All of us from time to time in the most varied of circumstances have to decide whether we shall obey God or man. Will my Christian commitment inevitably force me to act and to speak, if thus I think, in ways others will construe as inconvenient or even hostile? The answer must be "yes" if I live and work in the apostolic tradition. For, whoever I am priest or layman, religious or family member, whatever my financial or social status may be, the fact of my Baptism and Confirmation (if not of my Orders or Marriage) makes me a representative of Christ. All of us are shepherds to someone. Christ has no amorphous flock led from on high. He has live and living persons who are his and, therefore, like him.

Visions of grandeur may seem far off but every time we enter this church we are before the slain and enthroned Lamb. At this very altar he comes to us, "borne aloft on angels' wings". Our hymns are the hymns of heaven and our worship is one with that of the four beats, the twenty four elders, the immense crowd. We are members of ten thousand times ten thousand.

That is why our sacrificial worship, the Eucharist of him who is at once Good Shepherd in protection and blood-shedding Lamb in self-giving, is "uplifting" and accomplishes so much transcendence in our lives.

Best of all, the same Risen Savior who both forgave and commissioned St. Peter forgives and commissions us. At the center of our religion and of our religious experience is a man who is God. He calls us to a relationship never to be broken. He calls us to an intimacy no creature could give. He calls us to hear and answer him, to share his risen life, to walk in the footprints of his death. He our Good Shepherd, calls us to a pastoral reality; to be his deputies and his aides; to feed his lambs and to feed his sheep. He calls us, yes, you and me, to dare and care, to share and to die and – what glory! – to rise up and reign with him.

#### **Fourth Sunday of Easter**

**May 10, 1992**

*Readings: 1st Acts 13, 14 & 43-52 p73*

*2nd Rev 7, 9 & 14b-17*

*Gospel Jn 10, 27-30*

As we did last Sunday so also today we shall consider Jesus the Good Shepherd as one and the same person as Jesus the Lamb. The study to which the readings impell us today should be even more in depth and the ecclesial implications both on earth and in heaven even further in their reach. For we are at the heart of the mystery of the Risen Christ (humble self-giving raised to the glory of inexhaustable spiritual wealth) and on the verge of discovering the true rationale of all Christian apostolate (a well-nigh "disinterested" but no means "unconcerned" presentation of Christ as God's Word made flesh in both his humiliations and ours, his glory and ours, source of all worth mentioning).

Let us begin with the apocalyptic scene so brilliantly portrayed in the second reading. We are dealing with a passage of Revelation which raises the causality of suffering to an infinite dimension, that is beyond all dimension, to the sphere of divine presence and divine life. The Lamb is the Shepherd precisely for

those bearers of tribulation who have been exalted like him to glory through the shedding of blood whether his or theirs. Being a Christian is being "clothed" with something new and different. Being a Christian is being restored to innocence by baptism. Being a Christian is having victory, (the palm of Resurrection triumph) in one's hands. Being a Christian is being a sheep shepherded by the Lamb. For Christ alone can lead us to the Holy Spirit, whose springs of water are foretold in Jeremiah 2,13. And the spirit alone is God drying our tears.

The Gospel presents the relationship of shepherd and sheep as a responsibility assumed at the Father's behest by the Eternal Son. As we are told elsewhere Jesus is no hireling. He is the divine heir. And, therefore, the sheep *belong* to him. They can be neither lost nor stolen precisely because they have been lifted up by their shepherd to a relationship with the Father, their owner, not to be broken. Christ's care is neither dilatory nor haphazard. It follows a plan, heavenly at once in both origin and goal. This plan is utilized by the shepherd to lead his sheep. They listen to Christ's voice because it is the voice they have come to know and trust. It is the sound that leads to life.

The practical implications of the fully rewarded suffering of the self-less and of the abiding relationship with the Father of the Son's sheep are brought out in the first reading. St. Luke's style is deceptive. He is no mere chronicler. He is attempting to be a sacred historian. As such, his concern is more with doctrinal meaning than with banal factuality. Just what Paul and Barnabas were up to in Antioch in Pisidia is far from clear. But Luke makes use of their presence there during the First Missionary Journey to give the ideological purport for the shift from preaching to Jews to preaching to pagans. The break with the synagogue and the stance in the forum issue forth in persecution and expulsion from the place. But the ambassadors of Christ go off to Iconium gleeful in the Spirit. For the shepherd has won new sheep and still more who were lost will be found. The temporary triumph of the wolves is always short-lived. For Christ is risen and will ever claim his own.

Our lives on this earth all too often seem anything but triumphs over our foes. That is why we must constantly remind ourselves that the only real victory is the Lord's. It is not mine

for preaching so well or yours for listening so attentively. It is his and so are we, sheep of the flock of the Lamb. He can and will lead you and me out of every sorrow. He can and will wipe away all tears. But this can only happen if we stand before him and before the Father clothed in the white robes which are gift of the gift, the Holy Spirit's great present to us.

Jesus will never abandon us. He will allow no economic oppression, no political set-back, no fiend from Hell to lead us astray or steal us. His perfect command over us and all situations in our lives derives from that eternal relationships which is his with the Father but which he as Son calls us as Sons and daughters to share in the Father's House. The Father is Lord of all. The Son is consubstantial Lord. The Holy Spirit is life-giving and divinely sharing Lord. As we invoke the name of the Trinity we are saved, sheltered, protected, nurtured, strengthened and herded home.

Like Paul and Barnabas, however, we have work to do. The Good Shepherd leads us. He teaches us the song of the Lamb. But we must not dilly-dally on the way. When one effort fails we must try another. When one audience is repulsive we must find a new, receptive one. When one place tires of our words we must move on. But whatever we do we must do it for Christ, with Christ, under Christ's leadership and fully expectant that out of every suffering and rebuff as long as the Lamb is Shepherd our triumph and victory (for they are his) will be both lasting and secure.

### **Fifth Sunday of Easter**

**May 17, 1992**

*Readings:* 1st      Acts 14,21b-27  
                 2nd      Rev 21, 10-14 & 22-23  
                 Gospel Jn 13, 31-33a & 34-35

On this Fifth Sunday of Easter in this third year of the cycle of readings the Church asks us to consider three distinct but inter-related truths. First is the concept of the "open door" as sign of an inchoate success. Secondly the new heaven and new earth signify not only God's triumph but our solace, too. And, finally, in the Gospel we hear of a new commandment, a word from the Word, which is both normative and elevating for those who heed it and thus learn to live in love as imitation of Christ.



Paul and Barnabas retrace their steps for the Holy Spirit has impelled them to "check up" on the fruits of their initial apostolate in Anatolia. Having first evangelized the region, they now go back to set up lasting structures. But both the initial preaching (accompanied as it was by persecution) and the commendation of new leaders to the Lord in a context of prayer and fasting are merely a start. What causes the greatest rejoicing is that on return to their point of departure, Antioch in Pisidia, they can acknowledge an "open door." Something new has been done and, thanks to this break through, more new things will follow. The missionary efforts of the Church will be blessed down through the ages to today and tomorrow.

The second reading is near the end of the book of Revelation. It too speaks of newness, not now on an earthly missionary plane but cosmically. The first creation has disappeared. Evil is eliminated and a new heaven and new earth are wrought by God as the fit abode of the redeemed. The terror of the ocean is destroyed and full and perfect order ensue according to the divine plan, ever orderly and ever reordering. Now all is grace for all is holy. The new city is God's city, planned and built by him alone. Here paradise is regained for God, as the voice from on high insists, dwells with man. The presence of God is no longer manifest in the pillars cloud and fire of Exodus. God's presence is the person of his eternal Son, Emmanuel. The consolation of dried tears is now elevated to being the prelude of the deathless, joy fulfilled universe. For the past is gone, and the future is the holiness of a ceaseless "recreation" in which God will never rest.

In the Gospel our Lord talks of his own glory and our way to attaining his glory and our way to attaining his glory in, through and by him. He is really speaking, in the exquisite obscurity of the Johannine language in which his discourse is couched, of his Paschal Mystery and our active, loving share in its ceaseless celebration and proclamation in which his task and its rewards become our own. The *mandatum* has taken place. The Last Supper is drawing to a close. Judas has fled into the darkness which is the home of sin. Jesus glorified will be temporarily absent. But his love will always be present and a sign that his own are awaiting his return. Others can only know

we are Christians if we are Christlike. The interiority of our love in all its depth must come to the surface to make the Lord of Glory known.

God has placed many open doors in your life and mine if we have done the spade work properly. We can have a certain rightful status as individuals and community if we have been evangelized and converted and are now identified with Christ. But this status, must never be a place of rest. Falling back on our laurels will not do. We must be up and about and pass through the door which God has opened so that our faith and hope and love can be shared, made known and penetrate still more lives.

Every old thing must, therefore, pass away. Certainly nothing evil is worth clinging to and all terrors are best done without. But even "nice things" must perish if all is to be new. We must stop clinging to the old heaven even as we slough off the old earth. For newness is the will of God. It is not the newness of individual "perfection" but the newness of dynamic, communitarian presence of ourselves to God and God to us. No tears, no death, no mourning, no sorrow can abide in such a presence.

Jesus does not call us to some sort of endlessly prolonged and infinitely dreary "life unto death". Jesus has called us from the last moments of his earthly life until the present day to his glory. That glory can only be attained by those who are identified with Christ. Their identity is founded on love. Their identity is matured in love. And love sustains every outward sign of that identity.

We here present at this Holy Mass are the "little children" of glory and love. Much is needed and, indeed, found lacking in our Christian maturity. But our goal is certain. Having proclaimed God's love we shall be united with it forever.

### **Sixth Sunday of Easter**

**May 24, 1992**

Readings: 1st Acts 15, 1-2 & 22-29  
2nd Rev 21,10-14 & 22-23  
Gospel Jn 14,23-29

Today's readings tell us about the so-called "Council of Jerusalem", about the symbolic characteristics of the New Jerusalem and about the Holy Spirit as third divine person and second Paraclete ("comforter" or "advocate") presenting God to man and pleasing with God for man. They take us, thus, into the reality of the Church as Pilgrim People of God, a reality worked out in history, originating from on high and sustained, nurtured, instructed and reorientated to ever higher levels by the Holy Spirit as God himself.

Like last Sunday's first reading, today's involves a return journey. But this time it is that of emissaries from the daughter Church of Antioch going back to the Mother Church of Jerusalem with a pressing problem. Whether or not this is the same visit of St. Paul to the Holy City as described in the second chapter of Galatians is open to question as are both the chronology and the *dramatis personae* of the "Council" to say nothing of its conclusions. The truth St. Luke is getting at remains cogent, however, and this is that Christianity cannot remain a tradition-bound Jewish sect and survive. All pharisaical legalism hiding behind a Christian "front" is doomed to withering, failure and death. For the message of Christ is not one of outward observances but of inward change of heart. This message can be "inculturated" at any time and in any place with no need for judaizing those who hear and accept it. Certain minimal rules may be both desirable and even inspired for the time being but Christians are not recognized even two centuries after Luke's time as abstainers from certain kinds of meat. Christian purity in the inward sense and Christian sexual morality will, of course, ever follow strict lives.

From a high mountain the glorious New Jerusalem is viewed by the seer of Revelation. As there were twelve tribes in Israel and there are twelve apostles in the Church, so there are twelve gates of the square (that is, "completed") city, each guarded by an angel. Here we have both continuity and fulfillment, rounded off by endless protection. The church's foundation is the apostolic teaching of her faith which is essentially as unchanging as it is true. There is no temple, for God is all in all.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, now eternally glorified on high, in his earthly life promised another divine person yet to come. This

person is, of course, the Holy Spirit who pleads for us before the Father and gives us constant reminders of the Son and what he has done for us as saving work and saving doctrine. Only if we are brought into harmony and communion with God can we have true peace. To "keep" the Father's word, the Word's love must dwell in us, and we must love him. This love, a gift difficult to attain to, is reinforced by the Holy Spirit who is Christ's heavenly absence brings us to the order of peace, the constant self donation of love and the victory of salvation. All of this is possible because God as Trinity has a triple concern for you and me. He has willed us into being. He has been exalted having been abased. And he constantly reiterates those deeds and sayings which make us firm in hope.

How many times our lives in the contemporary world must involve tolerance and reasonable compromise if we are to survive! If we put abstract principles before human relationships we shall surely falter and fail. And yet there are basic, concurrent statements on behavior to which all must agree. Like the apostles we must have "councils" from time to time in which there is both giving and taking. But we must constantly pray that Christ's role remain central lest the inspiration of his Spirit count for nought.

Our call to glory is a call to self-realization in the heights based on the depths of our response. Jewelled and four-square with entrances and protective spirits the Church will ever have the "catholicity" of its twelve foundation stones. For in itself it is a complete and completed "heavenly" reality. But it comes down to earth where its glory beyond telling can often be seen only with the eyes of faith. That is why we must constantly return to basics and refine our vision beyond earthly lives.

All that we do can be referred to God. We can praise and thank him as Father of every light. We can see him as our redeemer glorified, for he has risen from the dead. We can invoke him as Holy Spirit knowing his comfort and his strength are always ours. And we can go on our pilgrim way made glad that our direction is right, our footsteps are guided and, for the eyes of the heart, our goal (though far ahead) is always in sight.

## The Solemnity of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ

May 31, 1992

Readings: 1st        Acts 1,1-11  
              2nd        Either Eph 1,17-23  
                         or Heb 9, 24 & 28 and 10,19-23  
Gospel    Lk 24,46-53

On this Solemnity of our Lord's Glorious Ascension only the Gospel is proper to the Third year of the cycle. This means we have read two Lucan accounts of the same event. These accounts are deceptive because the "chronology" which is probably a mere literary device in the original text has become "canonized" and people calculate that Sunday is too late to celebrate what "happened" on Thursday! Let us, therefore, stress the importance of *event as mystery* rather than the artifice of dating. What is important is that Christ in his glorious, risen body is now "on high", a complete man who is truly God in the presence of the Father. Any imagery or symbolic numerical calculation we use must have as its sole rightful function the underlining of this truth.

In writing a "secondary prologue" to volume two of his work St. Luke makes a quick and almost unnoticeable transition from the Gospel to Acts. His speed has as its background motivation Luke's great theological desire to propound a doctrine of the Holy Spirit hinted at as "Promise of the Father" in *Lk.* 24, 49 and now explicitly mentioned three times (therefore, as promise fulfilled in wake of the Ascension mystery) in the first eight verses of the first chapter of Acts. Of course the whole program of the book is alluded to as well before the Ascension-event is repeated with its eschabological *coda* on the lips of an angel.

Both the first reading and the gospel are important as two theological discourses on what it means for Jesus to be suddenly absent from his community. His presence in an old way (even if that was in itself glorious) is transcended by his presence in promise and power, presence in a new way meant to last while time endures. And in this we are at the heart of the Ascension mystery: there cannot be newness until the old vanishes from our sight. For what happened in Christ's earthly life, passion, death and resurrection must be seen by us in a new light.

It is no mere historic memory to which we are to cling. It is a series of mystery events initiated, wrought, presented and rounded off by the power and in the presence of God himself.

If we choose the first alternative as second reading we find a Pauline analysis with a notable gap. The very mystery we are celebrating is unmentioned. It remains implicit. Christ is risen. And he is seated at the Father's right hand. There he is a superior to every created being. But his fulness is not "localized" there alone. It fills all creation. And as head he shares it to the utmost degree attainable for us with the Church to which we belong as his body.

The reading from the Hebrews, if chosen, emphasizes another truth, that of the perfect sacrifice of Christ as the source of our only real assurance in the face of judgment. The very heavens themselves must be cleansed by the Salvific presence of Jesus. For he alone can fulfill every ancient type. He alone can take away our sins. He alone will come again, not (as at the first time) to inaugurate salvation by forgiveness but to complete salvation by definitive and by a more memorable presence.

*Either of the second readings will have spoken to us in terms of Christ in fulness.* Again, this is what the Ascension is most essentially concerned with. The ascension is a mystery of fulfillment in that in the event it underscores and to which it refers Christ fulfils his earthly life and resurrection appearances. He has not left us forever. He will come again. But when he does things will be different. Once he come in humility and sank (for our sakes) to the pit of death. His coming again will be in glory and he shall lift us up to the heights where he already is.

Our lives involve many separations. Friends and loved ones die, go abroad to work for years or leave us in other ways. If we cling to their material presence to which we have no present or future access we act like persons without faith. But if we quietly let go of them in one way, an old and merely material one, we can find them in another: new, spiritual, godlike because identified with Christ. Unless Christ ascends the Spirit cannot come. And we need the sheer newness of the Spirit. We need the promise of God as something fulfilled in time and space. We need the power of God for new life. Let us, then, "let go" of the Lord to find him

anew in greater reality. Let us "let God" the Father at whose right hand he sits use him to send us the Holy Spirit. Let night be over and day dawn. Let us live in the light of the Risen Christ's victory made permanent and seal in our hearts by the mystery of the Ascension. Let us await in joy the constantly renewed Advent of the Holy Spirit, Amen!

## **Vigil of Pentecost**

**June 6, 1992**

*Readings: 1st            Gen 11,1-9 or Ex 19,3-8a*

*Ez 37,1-14 or Joel 3,1-5*

*2nd            Rom 8,22-27*

*Gospel    Jn 7,37-39*

This Vigil Mass which we celebrate in the late afternoon or evening has many special and distinctive features. As on few other occasions the celebrant is free to pick any of four first readings each of which relates this feast and mystery to an Old Testament "type" of the fulfilled "anti-type" not only on the vigil Gospel but on the meaning of the whole solemnity of the Holy Spirit.

The Genesis reading tells the classical bible story of Babel: how pride goes before a fall and that fall "confounds tongues" so that people of different nations and races are alienated by their distinct and (to others) unintelligible speech. Exodus recounts, in the selected passage, the divine promise of a covenant as ongoing protection and nurture from on High. Ezekiel tells of dry bones clothed with flesh and brought to life, and Joel boldly proclaims the coming of the Spirit with dire effects. In each and all of these accounts the vast, wondrous and inexhaustible transcendence of God is found and stressed. God is Spirit, indeed, and as such beyond our glib comprehension.

St. Paul in the eighth chapter of Romans gives a "mini-theology" of the Holy Spirit through whom we are destined to glory. Within us he is fruitful, challenging, protective and corrective. He makes our prayers worthy of answer for he prays in us aligning our minds with the very intellect of God.

In the Gospel, Jesus himself takes up the prophetic – in deed, typically deuterio-Isaian- image of water in reference to the

rites of the Feast of Tabernacles and makes it something new, deep and true. He speaks of the reality of the Holy Spirit in a way only deep interiority can begin to comprehend.

It seems evident that this whole vigil has an air of preparation, as do all vigils, about it which, however, does not stop short at some sort of chronology in commemoration. Rather, the mystery of faith which is the Old Testament foretelling in achieved interplay with its New Testament fulfillment resounds through the whole liturgy of the word, whatever options are taken.

We, as we anticipate tomorrow's event, are people of confused tongues and Godless communications! In our pride we have cut ourselves off from others nearby and, even more, from those afar off. We need God's promise. We need his ongoing help. Most of all we need his guiding hand, day by day. All too easily has our community become, time and again a rally of dry bones to which only God can give flesh and life. And we need ears to hear the subtle sounds of a true prophetic charism.

Only the Holy Spirit can lighten our darkness and give us hope. He alone can lead us from glory to glory by turning our minds to God and our hearts to one another. For he alone is Living Water and gift from on High. The Holy Spirit can and will penetrate our innermost depths if we invite him to "fall afresh on us" and are willing to discover a newness of life deep within our very selves. Then we shall be the People of God, Christ's ransomed heirs, indeed. Then we shall be the earth's priesthood and heaven's songsters. Then as wave after wave surges from the source of our hidden river we shall well up with glee to the heights of our destiny in Christ. And we shall rejoice as God's own sons and daughters forever. Amen! Alleluia!

## **Pentecost**

**June 7, 1992**

*Readings:* 1st        Acts 2,1-11  
                 2nd        1 Cor 12,3-7 & 12-13  
                 Gospel   Jn 20,19-23

Today is a Solemnity lacking in the claim of Easter to be "Feast of Feasts" and in the popularity of Christmas in universal



if not always very intelligent sentiment. But it is a day which has since antiquity been of primary greatness in the liturgical calendar and has recently "come into its own" again in the lives of millions of the faithful. It is first and foremost a feast of the Holy Spirit himself and only secondarily one of the "utility" of the Spirit for the Church or the World. Because the Holy Spirit has chosen to be the most subtle and "secretive" of the Divine Persons this once made the feast hard to celebrate except as an appendage and rounding off of Easter. In some local Churches of the middle ages roses red in color were made to drop from the ceilings of Church buildings. Elsewhere, less dramatically, the day became a hinge for moving the liturgical door from one aperture to another.

Then came Vatican II where Eastern theologians reminded the rest of us of the importance (yes, and the very existence) of the Holy Spirit whose resonance had been "soft-pedalled" since the Council of Florence in 1439. In the wake of the Council came great, fresh outpourings of the Holy Spirit. Individuals, communities and whole movements in the Church experienced a pneumatic encounter which was perceptible, explicit and, thank God, publically acknowledged! Spirituality emerged from the closet and God the Holy Spirit was invoked and praised in new and startling ways from humble prayer meetings to gatherings in great Roman basilicas. And then we began to celebrate Pentecost as its meaning deserves in rallies and grandstand Masses in huge, open assemblies where persons of every rank, class and social status raised hearts, hands and voices in unabated joy!

The first reading gives Luke's account of the Pentecost event. Chronology in *Acts* is purposely contrived but there is no reason to think the harvest feast that by the time of Christ had become one commemorating the giving of the Law to Moses on Sinai had no other significance for the early community. Not till the fourth century did Christians, however, take Luke's chronology either of the Ascension or of Pentecost seriously enough to build calendars and cycles around them. Nor should we. The point of the reading is that when prayer is answered things change in ways both dramatic and memorable.

The second reading takes us into the realm of Pauline expository teaching. St. Paul's point is that no one should pride

him or herself on some isolated phenomenon, christen the phenomenon "charism" and claim a privileged hearing by or transmission from the Holy Spirit. For the Spirit is one and gives to each Christian what is needed for a particular purpose, making the gift compliment the person who receives and bears it.

In the Gospel St. John raises us to the height of apostolic perception of why the Spirit is needed. The condition *qua non* of true Christianity is forgiveness. But only the Risen Lord who has suffered every indignity of every sin can be the catalyst of divine forgiveness. So he sends the Holy Spirit by breathing on the Apostles. That John's chronology is different from Luke's is of no great significance. It only shows the lowly and relatively unimportant place of chronology is conveying profound theological insights.

And here we are. Does the Holy Spirit come to us with wind and fire? He will if we let him. Does the Holy Spirit from whom we have all drunk knit us into one body where each of us uses our gifts and his for the good of all? He wants to. Has the Spirit we have received changed us from the hard hearted bigots we were tempted to be into instruments of the Father's love because we forgive? If Christ has risen and breathed upon us and if we have openly believed in him and received the Spirit, yes.

Then we can dance and sing, making merry before the Lord, for the Spirit has come enthroning Christ in our hearts and turning our minds and whole being back to the Father's World!

### Trinity Sunday

June 14, 1992

Readings: 1st      Prov 8,22-31  
              2nd      Rom 5,1-5  
              Gospel Jn 16,12-15

Those who attend Mass daily or even occasionally during the week, will know that the Ordinary Time was resumed with Monday of the Tenth Week the day after last Sunday, Pentecost. However, our Sunday cycle is broken with today's Solemnity of the Holy Trinity and next Sunday's Solemnity of the Body and

Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi). The reasons for these interruptions are centuries old and worth a brief comment.

Having a feast of the Most Holy Trinity seemed even to the medieval mind somewhat incongruous – for every Sunday (and every feast, for that matter) is *primarily* dedicated to God in the highest form of worship, *latría*, which is proper and exclusive to him and him alone. However, having celebrated the paschal mystery from Ash Wednesday to Pentecost, it was deemed appropriate to “round it off” with joyous thanksgiving to God as he is: Father Son and the Holy Spirit.

Like many feasts this one arose partly from practical considerations. The Ember Days of Pentecost during which joyful celebration in red vestments was mixed with strict fasting were times (Wednesday and Friday) for preparations for Ordination and for the conferring of Orders (Saturday). In time the customs of the Roman curia (housed as it was either in Italian hill-towns or, later, in Avignon in Provence) made for the frequent and finally inevitable postponing of the tonsuring of new clerics on Saturday evening after First Vespers of the Sunday after Pentecost. Then Ordinations to Minor and Major Orders up to the priesthood took place in what amounted to an all-night vigil. The Ordination Mass had no proper. The Saturday had passed. The Sunday proper seemed inappropriate as it was the first of a series for the then “Ordinary Time.” Thus, a votive Mass of the Holy Trinity, composed in the seventh century, was usually substituted in the early thirteenth. As the Pope celebrated no further Mass, after being up most of the night ordaining candidates, his “vigil” rite became the usage of those Bishops and priests living in or near the Papal court who did celebrate on Sunday morning, while Monasteries and more remote places celebrated the Mass of the First Sunday after Pentecost which they tended to turn into an octave despite its unsatisfactory propers. The resolution to the liturgical problem posed by such double usage was revolved in 1334 when Pope John XXII, who reigned in Avignon, extended the feast of the Most Holy Trinity to the Universal Church. St. Pius X made it the equivalent of a Solemnity early in our century.

The first reading from the eightith chapter of Proverbs is almost the last part of the second discourse on personified wisdom of that book. The personification involved is as literarily sophis-

ticated ( and, indeed, fine) as it is, by Christian standards, theologically inaccurate. Wisdom is portrayed on a divine emanation, acquired by God through extraordinary creative process not like that used for other things but parallel with a father's generative act. This process is specified neither temporally nor eternally but placed in the most remote antiquity. Wisdom in any case, is less than God both as regards nature and as regards perdurance. Wisdom is, however, used by God to make, order and sustain his exterior (probably material) works. Is this use "active" or "passive"? We are not told. Wisdom is related to God, however, in a childlike, playful way as the object of his delight.

St. Paul writes to the Romans with unabashed doctrinal accuracy. Here the question is not one of a glorified attribute attaining metaphorical or mythic personality. Rather it is that of Father, Son and Spirit in an eternal interplay of overflowing love. In other words St. Paul takes us to the very core of the central mystery of our faith. In and as Trinity the Three divine Persons can only be distinguished in terms of their mutual relations, as their very essence as God and all the divine attributes are perfectly and coequally shared in that created eternity where God alone can be perfectly "at home". Our reconciliation, our hope and our participation in him depend on how God is in himself.

The sixteenth chapter of St. John's gospel makes the staggering truth of the Trinity even clearer, in that here Jesus himself talks not only of his relationship with the Father (from which all that he has and gives comes as truly his own because eternally bestowed on him) but of the subtle and sensitive role of the Holy Spirit who, down through time, will bestow the heritage of Christ as certain knowledge upon his followers.

Nothing about this doctrine is easy. There is no way to reduce it to glib slogans or to pretend we thoroughly understand it. Yet it is the very bedrock of our faith. "No Trinity, no Christianity" is a true enough and certainly orthodox *mot juste*. But were we to spend all our lives analyzing the mystery of the Trinity and all eternity in its contemplation we could never come to the point of exhaustive understanding. For God alone has full, personal understanding of himself.

And so this Sunday is a good occasion for reflecting on that faith which transcends reason. We believe so much more than we know. And, yet, our faith is not in subtleties and vagaries as such. Our faith is in the Father who loves us and sent his son to die for us. Our faith is in that eternal Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, whose saving work has freed us from sin and death. Our faith is in grace and consolation and our ecclesial fellowship together in the Holy Spirit who is as near to us as the source of our own physical breath. Three Persons, one God! May the Trinity dwell in our hearts all our days and be our joy forever.

### **The Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi Sunday)**

**June 21, 1992**

*Readings:* 1st      Gen 14,18-20  
                 2nd      1Gr 11,23-26  
                 Gospel Lk 9,11-17

As was the case last Sunday, today's solemnity makes little sense without a note on its history. The Holy Eucharist was of course instituted at the Last Supper. Therefore, Holy Thursday should of its nature be the annual commemoration of the event. But by the High Middle Ages Thursday in Holy Week had also acquired two further emphases: namely, the reconciliation of penitents and the consecrating of the three oils. Nothing now remains of the one-time Mass of Reconciliation, but the Mass of Charism is a lasting feature in Cathedral Churches. In any case, profound contemplation of the Paschal Mystery in its entirety was thought in time to make a special celebration in honor of the Eucharist in particular out of place on Holy Thursday.

Because of various doctrinal controversies from the tenth century onwards by the XIIIth century it was thought wise to "objectivize" the presence of Christ both in teaching and devotion. The devotional aspect fostered a special celebration. The key figures in bringing it about were Blessed Juliane of Mt. Cornillon and her bishop, Robert de Torote, of Liege. Many other holy and famous people played their part so that by 1246 a local feast in Belgium on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday was mandated. Pope Urban IV, a former Archdeacon of Liege who

was eager to extend this feast to the Universal Church, asked St. Thomas Aquinas to collate and compose an office and Mass of the Body of Christ. By the bull *Transiturus*, this usage was promulgated on September 11, 1264. However, the Pope died less than a month later and it was not until the reign of Clement V in the early XIVth century that the matter was taken up again. Clement's successor, John XXII, promulgated the feast anew in 1317, and it has been with us since. The procession attached to it is much later in provenance, dating only from the XVth Century. At the time of the Reformation this feast was the occasion of much controversy and was utterly rejected by all who broke with Rome except the Anglicans.

In recent times we have updated Corpus Christi and in many countries transferred it from Thursday to Sunday thus making its doctrine and rites more available to the vast majority of the faithful. Amongst other features the readings now vary according to the three year cycle.

The first reading this year gives the Genesis account of the shadows, figure of Melchizedek who, being both king and priest, offers a sacrifice of bread and wine and elicits from Abraham a tithe of all he has. Melchizedek represents Christ and Abraham redeemed humanity. The bread and wine are Christ's body and blood in prefigured symbol and the tithe is our participation in and benefit from Christ's saving work made eucharistically present.

The second reading is the classical Pauline account of the institution of the eucharistic sacrament. It is probably the oldest account we have and may well reflect the then current usage of Corinth and other churches founded by St. Paul. Its telling mark is in the final phrase where we are told our eating and drinking is an act of proclamation of Christ's death (and its meaning) until he comes. Thus, the Eucharist is seen as *viaticum*, food for our pilgrim journey until the end of time.

Finally the gospel shows us how St. Luke handles the miracle of multiplication. The profound theological insight is that Christ has plenty for everyone and a sizeable quantity to spare. In other words, not only is redemption universal but so is sacramental life. Christ is ever ready to feed us in a way beyond

telling with his Body and to give us his precious Blood as the drink of salvation in a foretaste of his ample messianic feast on High.

And so this feast is a call to make our life one centered on Christ. Christ's presence is constantly available to us. We need it for our sustenance. It merits our adoration. Our access to Christ is not limited to sacramental encounters but it is especially well focused and made more intense thereby. As we come to receive Christ more worthily we give of ourselves and benefit from him more truly. We adore him for his saving work, his glory and his life in which his humanity as glorified is hidden in the Godhead he shares with the Father and the Spirit and benignly extends to us.

### **Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

**June 28, 1992**

*Readings:* 1st        1 Kngs 19,16b & 19-21  
                 2nd        Gol 5,1 & 13-18  
                 Gospel   Lk 9,51-62

As we return to the Ordinary Time today and vest celebrant and ministers and array the church in green, we take up a basic element of Christians life, vocation or calling, as theme. The whole Ordinary Time is directed not towards celebrating great events and mysteries as such (though they sometimes inevitably enter the readings in passing) but to underlining, explaining and advancing Christian maturity. There is no growth worthy of the name unless there is a solid and recognizable beginning.

In the first reading Elijah does not call his successor, Elisha. God does. Elijah (being informed by God of his tasks) merely gives unmistakeable signs to Elisha that he, Elijah, is God's instrument and that succession involves a sort of "inheritance" of prophetic power. Our call, too, comes from God and ultimately from God alone. But the Church and her ministers confirm it, often testing us meanwhile with symbolic and difficult acts to see if we are worthy, in human terms, of the responsibilities God will lay upon us in any state or way of life to which we, unworthy in his eyes of course, may be called. So in the discernment of any

vocation we must look at least for traces of divine motivation and signs of God's call, the clearer the better.

In the Gospel we see that our Lord Jesus Christ calls some who are reluctant or even refuse to follow him and spurns the direct, physical company of the over eager and conditional would be followers in his earthly life. This can appear puzzling unless, again, we turn to the divine source of all vocation. Every calling in Christian terms is a challenge to do God's will. Closeness to Christ cannot be a mere "power trip". Thus, calling down fire from heaven is rebuked. Nor can it be willy nilly self oblation. The cost, which is great, must be seen and counted. Finally, it cannot be just one item in a scheme of long range planning' future burials or fairwell parties getting a greater emphasis.

No. Following Christ is homeless detachment. Following Christ is indifference to future contingencies and present sentiments. Following Christ is not the act of the casual volunteer but the life long dedication of the true worker for the kingdom. There can be no turning back because even a lifetime is not enough to complete the assigned task to which each of us is called.

St. Paul resolves the problem well is posing our vocation as a call to freedom which involves risks. Indeed in Christ we are free. But we are free to love, not to hate. We are free for positive goals not for negative bickering. We are free to serve God, not to opt for Satan. Who guarantees our freedom? The Holy Spirit who guards us from its opposite, self indulgence, and guarantees it. He bolsters our good intentions and overcomes our pride. He, being Spirit, grants us to share Christ's victory of spirit over letter.

On the Sunday of our return to Ordinary Time let us be aware of our call. Let us fearlessly answer it. Let us know we are all meant to be prophets. Let us joyfully follow Christ. Then God the Holy Spirit will surely assure us we are indeed, "free at last"!



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 1009 (m) (1)

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The undersigned Tr. L. BILALING PETERSON, Editor/managing editor/business manager, owner/publisher of BILALING THE ECONOMIC REVIEW (title of publication) bi-monthly (frequency of issue) in English, Danish (language in which printed) at Cot. Publ. Offc., HST (office of publication) entered at second class (first, second, third class) office of entry at Hst. Post Office (post office where publication is mailed) after having duly sworn to in accordance with law, hereby submits the following statement of ownership, management, circulation, etc., which is required by Act 2580 as amended by Commonwealth Act. 201.

Address

Editor Fr. Román Santos, D.D. U.S., Manila  
Managing Editor no  
Business Manager Fr. Manuel C. Santos, D.D., Manila  
Owner University of Santo Tomas, Manila  
Publisher University of Santo Tomas, Manila  
Printer Cover Publishing, Inc., Manila  
Office of Publication Ecclesiastical Publications Office, U.S., Manila

If publication is owned by corporation, stockholders owing one percent or more of the total amount of stock

Bondholders, Mortgages or other security holders owing one percent or more of the total amount of security      no

In case of daily publication, average number of copies printed and circulated of each issue during the preceding month of \_\_\_\_\_

- |   |    |
|---|----|
| 1. Sent to paid subscribers             | na |
| 2. Sent to others than paid subscribers | na |
| Total                                   | na |

In case of publication other than daily total number of copies printed and circulated of the last issue dated January - February 1957

- |   |             |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Sent to paid subscribers             | 1000 copies |
| 2. Sent to others than paid subscribers | 500 copies  |
| Total                                   | 1500 copies |

*[Signature]*  
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SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN to before me this 10 day of MAR 31 1967 at Manila

issued at Pha on 2/25/72.

11-2-47	27
11-3-47	28
11-4-47	29
11-5-47	30

Documentary stamp needed:

(Person to Administer Oath)

Filed Dec. 31, 1992  
 PER No. 75170  
 Expiry Jan. 9, 1992