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Beyond Denominationalism

Roman Carter, O.P.

The letter published in this issue from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith signed on May 28 of this year by Cardinal Ratzinger to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on some aspects of the Church as Communion is a welcome, timely and very helpful analysis of how the Church is related to her component assemblies and members and to those Christians no longer or not yet in communion with her. It is welcome because it is definitive. It is timely because it resolves problems and clarifies misunderstandings. And it is very helpful because all societies are today religiously pluralistic, and some forms of "ecumenism" have led to bewilderment.

Tracing communion and sacrament through implications horizontal and vertical, visible and invisible, based on baptism and shared with all the saints, the document brings us from Church (in the universal sense) and Churches as local or particular to mutual recognition based on the ontological and temporal priority of the Universal Church. No one belongs to her through "mediation" of a local assembly but all immediately. Thus all share this communion of Churches wherever on earth they find themselves. Each in a sense belongs to all for by nature the Church is universal whatever its particular manifestation in geography.

The Eucharistic celebration itself while confined to a particular time and space by the limits of material reality is, nonethe-

less, a celebration of the Church one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic. For our Lord has but one body and one blood and whoever presides in any local Church is presided over by the Roman Pontiff as successor of Peter. The Bishop, source of local unity, refers in unity to the successor of Peter, *interior* president of every particular assembly. Eucharist and episcopate are interlinked *with Peter and under Peter*. This state of affairs implies that plurality, diversity, flexibility and service not as tolerated "extras," but as enriching features and states of life with supradiocesan characteristics as expressions of authentic charisms, can play their role in apostolate precisely because of this adaptability.

Wounds of the past can be healed when sacraments and ministry are valued and revalued, appreciated and restored. Unity can increase till the end of time. What is present in embryo can be brought to birth. And this is true ecumenism. Furthermore, Mary is present in and to the Church as "model of ecclesial communion" and our commitment to and reflection upon that communion is entrusted to her.

To clarify what I find implicit in the document let me turn to the Czech scholar, Werner Stark, who distinguishes in his first three volumes of *The Sociology of Religion* three distinct ecclesiastical categories: establishment, sect and universal Church. Succinctly "establishment" is the State Church, caeseropapal in inception, bureaucratic in evolution, a relic of things past in decay. "Sect" is a rebellious body, revolutionary and anti-worldly in inception which evolves toward respectability and toleration by and of the established Church when it becomes "denomination." "Universal Church" both transcends and distinguishes itself from any merely human organization and while existing in many times and places radically identifies itself with none. Only to the last category can the Catholic Church rightly be said to belong. But her members can, of course, wrongly identify her and hence at times try to force her into pseudo-positions as establishment or even sect. To make her a "denomination" in men's eyes might be even worse!

We must reject indifferentism. We must scorn the view that sees the Universal Church as "one among many" perhaps more venerable, larger, better organized or just a bit more quaint. All

such views are a travesty of catholicity. Popular post-Conciliar denominationalism is as deathly to real ecclesiology as nineteenth-century "confessionalism." For faith is not found in a name or in a formula but in a communion, a *koinonia*, the wider, the greater, the deeper, the more universal, the better. The basis for real ecumenical dialogue remains our self-declared traits, reiterated not in disdain but in welcoming love. But let our own joy remain in that Catholic fullness to which the Lord has called us and which we have found, for it is his own.

words for today

Pastores Dabo Vobis

John Paul II

Chapter III

THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME

The Spiritual Life of the Priest

A "Specific" Vocation to Holiness

19. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (*Lk* 4:18). The Spirit is not simply "upon" the Messiah, but he "fills" him, penetrating every part of him and reaching to the very depths of all that he is and does. Indeed, the Spirit is the principle of the "consecration" and "mission" of the Messiah: "because he has anointed me, and sent me to preach good news to the poor. . ." (cf. *Lk* 4:18). Through the Spirit, Jesus belongs totally and exclusively to God and shares in the infinite holiness of God, who calls him, chooses him and sends him forth. In this way the Spirit of the Lord is revealed as the source of holiness and of the call to holiness.

This same "Spirit of the Lord" is "upon" the entire People of God which becomes established as a People "consecrated" to God and "sent" by God to announce the Gospel of salvation. The members of the People of God are "inebriated" and "sealed" with the Spirit (cf. *1 Co* 12:13; *2 Co* 1:21 ff; *Ep* 1:13; 4:30) and called to holiness.

In particular, *the Spirit reveals to us and communicates the fundamental calling* which the Father addresses to everyone from all eternity: the vocation to be "holy and blameless before him. . . in love," by virtue of our predestination to be his adopted children through Jesus Christ (cf. *Ep* 1:4-5). This is not all. By revealing and communicating this vocation to us, *the Spirit becomes within us the principle and wellspring of its fulfillment*. He, the Spirit of the Son (cf. *Ga* 4:6), configures us to Christ Jesus and makes us sharers in his life as Son, that is, sharers in his life of love for the Father and for our brothers and sisters. "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit" (*Ga* 5:25). In these words the Apostle Paul reminds us that a Christian life is a "spiritual life," that is, a life enlivened and led by the Spirit towards holiness or the perfection of charity.

The Council's statement that "all Christians in any state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity"⁴⁰ applies in a special way to priests. They are called not only because they have been baptized, but also and specifically because they are priests, that is, under a new title and in new and different ways deriving from the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

20. The Council's Decree on Priestly Life and Ministry gives us a particularly rich and thought-provoking synthesis of the priest's "spiritual life" and of the gift and duty to become "saints": "By the Sacrament of Orders priests are configured to Christ the priest so that as ministers of the Head and co-workers with the episcopal order they may build up and establish his whole Body which is the Church. Like all Christians they have already received in the consecration of Baptism the sign and gift of their great calling and grace which enables and obliges them even in the midst of human weakness to seek perfection (cf. *2 Co* 12:9), according to the Lord's word: 'You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect' (*Mt* 5:48). But priests are bound in a special way to strive for this perfection, since they are consecrated to God in a new way by their ordination. They have become living instruments of Christ the eternal priest, so that through the ages they can accomplish his wonderful work of reuniting the whole human race with heavenly power. Therefore, since every priest in his own way represents the

⁴⁰Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 40.

person of Christ himself, he is endowed with a special grace. By this grace the priest, through his service of the people committed to his care and all the People of God, is able the better to pursue the perfection of Christ, whose place he takes. The human weakness of his flesh is remedied by the holiness of him who 'became for us a high priest holy, innocent, undefiled, separated from sinners' (Heb 7:26).⁴¹

The Council first affirms the "*common*" vocation to holiness. This vocation is rooted in Baptism, which characterizes the priest as one of the "faithful" (*Christifidelis*), as a "brother among brothers," a member of the People of God, joyfully sharing in the gifts of salvation (cf. *Ep* 4:4-6) and in the common duty of walking "according to the Spirit" in the footsteps of the one Master and Lord. We recall the celebrated words of Saint Augustine: "For you I am a Bishop, with you I am a Christian. The former title speaks of a task undertaken, the latter of grace; the former betokens danger, the latter salvation."⁴²

With the same clarity the conciliar text also speaks of a "*specific*" vocation to holiness, or more precisely of a vocation based on the Sacrament of Holy Orders, as a sacrament proper and specific to the priest, and thus involving a new consecration to God through ordination. Saint Augustine also alludes to this specific vocation when, after the words "For you I am a Bishop, with you I am a Christian," he goes on to say: "If therefore it is to me a greater cause of joy to have been rescued with you than to have been placed as your leader, following the Lord's command, I will devote myself to the best of my abilities to serve you, so as not to show myself ungrateful to him who rescued me with that price which has made me your fellow servant."⁴³

The conciliar text goes on to point out some elements necessary for defining what constitutes the "specific quality" of the priest's spiritual life. These elements connected with the priest's "consecration," which configures him to Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church, with the "mission" or ministry peculiar to the priest, which equips and obliges him to be a "living instrument of Christ the

⁴¹Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12.

⁴²*Sermo* 340, 1: PL 38: 1483.

⁴³*Ibid.*, loc. cit.

eternal priest" and to act "in the name and in the person of Christ himself," and with his entire "life," called to manifest and witness in a fundamental way the "radicalism of the Gospel."⁴⁴

Configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, and Pastoral Charity

21. By sacramental consecration the priest is configured to Jesus Christ as Head and Shepherd of the Church, and he is endowed with a "spiritual power" which is a share in the authority with which Jesus Christ guides the Church through his Spirit.⁴⁵

By virtue of this consecration brought about by the outpouring of the Spirit in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, the spiritual life of the priest is marked, molded and characterized by the way of thinking and acting proper to Jesus Christ, Head and Shepherd of the Church, and which are summed up in his pastoral charity.

Jesus Christ is *Head of the Church, his Body*. He is the "head" in the new and unique sense of being a "servant," according to his own words: "The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (*Mk 10:45*). Jesus' service attains its fullest expression in his death on the Cross, that is, in his total gift of self in humility and love. "He emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. . ." (*Ph 2:7-8*). The authority of Jesus Christ as Head coincides then with his service, with his gift, with his total, humble and loving dedication on behalf of the Church. All this he did in perfect obedience to the Father; he is the one true suffering Servant of God, both Priest and Victim.

The spiritual existence of every priest receives its life and inspiration from exactly this type of authority, from service to the Church, precisely inasmuch as it is required by the priest's configuration to Jesus Christ Head and Servant of the Church.⁴⁶ As Saint Augustine once reminded a Bishop on the day of his ordination: "He who is head of the people must in the first place realize that he

⁴⁴Cf. *Propositio 8*.

⁴⁵Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 2; 12.

⁴⁶Cf. *Propositio 8*.

is to be the servant of many. And he should not disdain being such, I say it once again, he should not disdain being the servant of many, because the Lord of Lords did not disdain to make himself our servant."⁴⁷

The spiritual life of the ministers of the New Testament should therefore be marked by this fundamental attitude of service to the People of God (cf. *Mt* 20:24 ff; *Mk* 10:43-44), freed from all presumption or desire of "lording over" those in their charge (cf. *1 Pt* 5:2-3). The priest is to perform this service freely and willingly as God desires. In this way the priests, as the ministers, the "elders" of the community, will be in their person the "model" of the flock, which, for its part, is called to display this same priestly attitude of service towards the world, in order to bring to humanity the fullness of life and complete liberation.

22. The figure of Jesus Christ as *Shepherd of the Church*, his flock, takes up and re-presents in new and more evocative terms the same content as that of Jesus Christ as Head and Servant. Fulfilling the prophetic proclamation of the Messiah and Savior joyfully announced by the psalmist and the Prophet Ezechiel (cf. *Ps* 22-23; *Ez* 34:11ff), Jesus presents himself as "the good Shepherd" (*Jn* 10:11, 14) not only of Israel but of all humanity (*Jn* 10:16). His whole life is a continual manifestation of his "pastoral charity," or rather, a daily enactment of it. He feels compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (cf. *Mt* 9:35-36). He goes in search of the straying and scattered sheep (cf. *Mt* 18:12-14) and joyfully celebrates their return. He gathers and protects them. He knows them and calls each one by name (cf. *Jn* 10:3). He leads them to green pastures and still waters (cf. *Ps* 22-23) and spreads a table for them, nourishing them with his own life. The Good Shepherd offers this life through his own Death and Resurrection, as the Church sings out in the Roman Liturgy: "The Good Shepherd is risen! He who laid down his life for his sheep, who died for his flock, he is risen, alleluia."⁴⁸

The author of the First Letter of Peter calls Jesus the "chief Shepherd" (*1 Pt* 5:4) because his work and mission continue in the

⁴⁷*Sermo Morin Guelferbytanus*, 32, 1: PLS 2, 637.

⁴⁸Roman Missal, Communion Antiphon from the Mass of the Fourth Sunday of Easter.

Church through the Apostles (cf. *Jn* 21:15-17) and their successors (cf. *1 Pt* 5:1 ff), and through priests. By virtue of their consecration, priests are configured to Jesus the Good Shepherd and are called to imitate and to live out his own pastoral charity.

Christ's gift of himself to his Church, the fruit of his love, is described in terms of that unique gift of self made by the Bridegroom to the Bride, as the sacred texts often suggest. *Jesus is the true Bridegroom* who offers to the Church the wine of salvation (cf. *Jn* 2:11). He who is "the Head of the Church, his body, and is himself its Savior" (*Ep* 5:23) "loved the Church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the Church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish" (*Ep* 5:25-27). The Church is indeed the body in which Christ the Head is present and active, but she is also the Bride who proceeds like a new Eve from the open side of the Redeemer on the Cross. Hence Christ stands "before" the Church, and "nourishes and cherishes her" (*Ep* 5:29), giving his life for her. The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the Spouse of the Church.⁴⁹ Of course, he will always remain a member of the community as a believer alongside his other brothers and sisters who have been called by the Spirit, but in virtue of his configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, the priest stands in this espousal relationship with regard to the community. "Inasmuch as he represents Christ, the Head, Shepherd and Spouse of the Church, the priest is placed not only in the Church but also in the forefront of the Church."⁵⁰ In his spiritual life, therefore, he is called to live out Christ's espousal love towards the Church, his Bride. Therefore, the priest's life ought to radiate this espousal character which demands that he be a witness to Christ's espousal love, and thus be capable of loving people with a heart which is new, generous and pure, with genuine self-detachment, with full, constant and faithful dedication and at the same time with a kind of "divine jealousy" (cf. *2 Co* 11:2), and even with a kind of maternal tenderness, capable of bearing "the pangs of birth" until "Christ be formed" in the faithful (cf. *Ga* 4:19).

⁴⁹Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 26: AAS 80 (1988), 1715-1716.

⁵⁰*Propositio* 7.

23. The internal principle, the force which animates and guides the spiritual life of the priest inasmuch as he is configured to Christ the Head and Shepherd, is *pastoral charity*, as a participation in Jesus Christ's own pastoral charity, a gift freely bestowed by the Holy Spirit and likewise a task and a call which demand a free and committed response on the part of the priest.

The essential content of this pastoral charity is the gift of self, the total gift of *self to the Church*, following the example of Christ. "Pastoral charity is the virtue by which we imitate Christ in his self-giving and service. It is not just what we do, but our gift of self, which manifests Christ's love for his flock. Pastoral charity determines our way of thinking and acting, our way of relating to people. It makes special demands on us. . ."⁵¹

The gift of self, which is the source and synthesis of pastoral charity, is directed towards the Church. This was true of Christ who "loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (*Ep* 5:25) and the same must be true for the priest. With pastoral charity, which distinguishes the exercise of the priestly ministry as an *amoris officium*,⁵² "the priest, who welcomes the call to ministry, is in a position to make this a loving choice, as a result of which the Church and souls become his first interest, and with this concrete spirituality he becomes capable of loving the universal Church and that part of it entrusted to him with the deep love of a husband for his wife."⁵³ The gift of self has no limits, marked as it is by the same apostolic and missionary zeal of Christ, the Good Shepherd, who said: "And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed by voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" (*Jn* 10:16).

Within the Church community the priest's pastoral charity impels and demands in a particular and specific way his personal relationship with the presbyterate, united in and with the Bishop, as the Council explicitly states: "Pastoral charity requires that a

⁵¹*Homily at Eucharistic Adoration, Seoul (7 October 1989), 2: Insegnamenti XII/2 (1989), 785.*

⁵²Saint Augustine, *In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* 123, 5: CCL 36, 678.

⁵³*To priests taking part in an assembly organized by the Italian Episcopal Conference (4 November 1980): Insegnamenti III/2 (1980), 1055.*

priest always work in the bond of communion with the bishop and with his brother priests, lest his efforts be in vain."⁵⁴

The gift of self to the Church concerns her insofar as she is the Body and the *Bride of Jesus Christ*. In this way the primary point of reference of the priest's charity is Jesus Christ himself. Only in loving and serving Christ the Head and Spouse will charity become a source, criterion, measure and impetus for the priest's love and service to the Church, the Body and Spouse of Christ. The Apostle Paul had a clear and sure understanding of this point. Writing to the Christians of the Church in Corinth, he refers to "ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Co 4:5). Above all, this was the explicit and programmatic teaching of Jesus when he entrusted to Peter the ministry of shepherding the flock only after his threefold affirmation of love, indeed only after he had expressed a preferential love: "He said to him the third time, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me?' Peter. . . said to him 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep. . .'" (Jn 21:17).

Pastoral charity, which has its specific source in the Sacrament of Holy Orders, finds its full expression and its supreme nourishment in the *Eucharist*. As the Council states: "This pastoral charity flows mainly from the Eucharistic Sacrifice, which is thus the center and root of the whole priestly life. The priestly soul strives thereby to apply to itself the action which takes place on the altar of sacrifice."⁵⁵ Indeed, the Eucharist represents, makes once again present, the sacrifice of the Cross, the full gift of Christ to the Church, the gift of his Body given and his Blood shed, as the supreme witness of the fact that he is Head and Shepherd, servant and Spouse of the Church. Precisely because of this, the priest's pastoral charity not only flows from the Eucharist but finds in the celebration of the Eucharist its highest realization, just as it is from the Eucharist that he receives the grace and obligation to give his whole life a "sacrificial" dimension.

This same pastoral charity is the dynamic inner principle capable of unifying the many different activities of the priest. In virtue of this pastoral charity the essential and permanent demand

⁵⁴"Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 14.

⁵⁵*ibid.*

for unity between the priest's interior life and all his external actions and the obligations of the ministry can be properly fulfilled, a demand particularly urgent in a socio-cultural and ecclesial context strongly marked by complexity, fragmentation and dispersion. Only by directing every moment and every one of his acts towards the fundamental choice to "give his life for the flock" can the priest guarantee this unity which is vital and indispensable for his harmony and spiritual balance. The Council reminds us that "priests attain to the unity of their lives by uniting themselves with Christ whose food was to fulfill the will of him who sent him to do his work. . . In this way, by assuming the role of the Good Shepherd they will find in the very exercise of pastoral charity the bond of priestly perfection which will unify their lives and activities."⁵⁶

The Spiritual Life in the Exercise of the Ministry

24. The Spirit of the Lord anointed Christ and sent him forth to announce the Gospel (cf. *Lk* 4:18). The priest's mission is not extraneous to his consecration or juxtaposed to it, but represents its intrinsic and vital purpose: *consecration is for mission*. In this sense, not only consecration but *mission as well is under the seal of the Spirit and the influence of his sanctifying power*.

This was the case in Jesus' life. This was the case in the lives of the Apostles and their successors. This is the case for the entire Church and within her for priests: all have received the Spirit as a gift and call to holiness in and through the carrying out of the mission.⁵⁷

Therefore, an intimate bond exists between the priest's spiritual life and the exercise of his ministry,⁵⁸ a bond which the Council expresses in this fashion: "And so it is that they are grounded in the life of the Spirit while they exercise the ministry of the Spirit and of justice (cf. *2 Co* 3:8-9), as long as they are docile to Christ's Spirit, who gives them life and guidance. For by their everyday sacred actions, as by the entire ministry which they exercise in union with the bishop and their fellow priests, they are being

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 75: AAS 68 (1976), 64-67.

⁵⁸Cf. *Propositio* 8.

directed towards perfection of life. Priestly holiness itself contributes very greatly to a fruitful fulfillment of the priestly ministry.”⁵⁹

Live the mystery that has been placed in your hands!” This is the invitation and admonition which the Church addresses to the priest in the Rite of Ordination, when the offerings of the holy people for the Eucharistic Sacrifice are placed in his hands. The “mystery” of which the priest is a “steward” (cf. *1 Co* 4:1) is definitively Jesus Christ himself, who in the Spirit is the source of holiness and the call to sanctification. This “mystery” seeks expression in the priestly life. For this to be so, there is need for great vigilance and lively awareness. Once again, the Rite of Ordination introduces these words with this recommendation: “be aware of what you will be doing.” In the same way that Paul had admonished Timothy, “Do not neglect the gift you have” (*1 Tm* 4:14; cf. *2 Tm* 1:6).

The relation between a priest’s spiritual life and the exercise of his ministry can also be explained on the basis of the pastoral charity bestowed by the Sacrament of Holy Orders. The ministry of the priest, precisely because of its participation in the saving ministry of Jesus Christ the Head and Shepherd, cannot fail to express and live out his pastoral charity which is both the source and spirit of his service and gift of self. In its objective reality the priestly ministry is an “*amoris officium*,” according to the previously quoted expression of Saint Augustine. This objective reality itself serves as both the basis and requirement for a corresponding *ethos*, which can be none other than a life of love, as Saint Augustine himself points out: *Sit amoris officium pascere dominicum gregem*.⁶⁰ This *ethos* and as a result the spiritual life, is none other than embracing consciously and freely — that is to say in one’s mind and heart, in one’s decisions and actions — the “truth” of the priestly ministry as an *amoris officium*.

25. For a spiritual life that grows through the exercise of the ministry, it is essential that the priest should continually renew and deepen his *awareness of being a minister of Jesus Christ* by virtue of sacramental consecration and configuration to Christ the Head and Shepherd of the Church.

⁵⁹Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12.

⁶⁰*In Iohannis Evangelium Tractatus* 123, 5: *loc. cit.*

This awareness is not only in accordance with the very nature of the mission which the priest carries out on behalf of the Church and humanity, but it also provides a focus for the spiritual life of the priest who carries out that mission. Indeed, the priest is chosen by Christ not as an "object" but as a "person." In other words, he is not inert and passive, but rather is a "living instrument," as the Council states, precisely in the passage where it refers to the duty to pursue this perfection.⁶¹ The Council also speaks of priests as "companions and helpers" of God who is "the holy one and sanctifier."⁶²

In this way the exercise of his ministry deeply involves the priest himself as a conscious, free and responsible person. The bond with Jesus Christ assured by consecration and configuration to him in the Sacrament of Orders gives rise to and requires in the priest the further bond which comes from his "intention," that is, from a conscious and free choice to do in his ministerial activities what the Church intends to do. This bond tends by its very nature to become as extensive and profound as possible, affecting one's way of thinking, feeling and life itself: in other words, creating a series of moral and spiritual "dispositions" which correspond to the ministerial actions performed by the priest.

There can be no doubt that the exercise of the priestly ministry, especially in the celebration of the Sacraments, receives its saving effects from the action of Christ himself who becomes present in the Sacraments. But so as to emphasize the gratuitous nature of salvation which makes a person both "saved" and a "savior" — always and only in Christ — God's plan has ordained that the efficacy of the exercise of the ministry is also conditioned by a greater or lesser human receptivity and participation.⁶³ In particular, the greater or lesser degree of the holiness of the minister has a real effect on the proclamation of the word, the celebration of the Sacraments and the leadership of the community in charity. This was clearly stated by the Council: "The very holiness of priests is of the greatest benefit for the fruitful fulfillment of their ministry. While it is possible for God's grace to carry out the work of salvation

⁶¹Cf. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12.

⁶²*Ibid.*, 5.

⁶³Cf. Council of Trent, Decree on Justification, cap. 7; Decree on Sacraments, can.

through unworthy ministers, yet God ordinarily prefers to show his wonders through those men who are more submissive to the impulse and guidance of the Holy Spirit and who, because of their intimate union with Christ and their holiness of life, are able to say with Saint Paul: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (*Ga* 2:20).⁶⁴

The consciousness that one is a minister of Jesus Christ the Head and Shepherd also brings with it a thankful and joyful awareness that one has received a singular grace and treasure from Jesus Christ: the grace of having been freely chosen by the Lord to be a "living instrument" in the work of salvation. This choice bears witness to Jesus Christ's love for the priest. This love, like other loves and yet even more so, demands a response. After his Resurrection, Jesus asked Peter the basic question about love: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" And following his response Jesus entrusts Peter with the mission: "Feed my lambs" (*Jn* 21:15). Jesus first asks Peter if he loves him so as to be able to entrust his flock to him. However, in reality it was Christ's own love, free and unsolicited, which gave rise to his question to Peter and to his act of entrusting "his" sheep to Peter. Therefore, every ministerial action, while it leads to loving and serving the Church, provides an incentive to grow in ever greater love and service of Jesus Christ the Head, Shepherd and Spouse of the Church, a love which is always a response to the free and unsolicited love of God in Christ. Growth in the love of Jesus Christ determines in turn the growth of love for the Church: "We are your shepherds (*pascimus vobis*), with you we receive nourishment (*pascimur vobiscum*). May the Lord give us the strength to love you to the extent of dying for you, either in fact or in desire (*aut effectu aut affectu*)."⁶⁵

26. Thanks to the insightful teaching of the Second Vatican Council,⁶⁶ we can grasp the conditions and demands, the manifestations and fruits of the intimate bond between the priest's spiritual life and the exercise of his threefold ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral charity.

⁶⁴Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 12.

⁶⁵Saint Augustine, *Sermo de Nat. Sant. Apost. Petri et Pauli ex Evangelio in quo ait: Simon Iohannis diligis me?: Bibliotheca Casimensis*, in "Miscellanea Augustiniana," vol. 1, ed. G. Morin, O.S.B., Rome, Typ. Poligl. Vat., 1930, p. 404.

⁶⁶Cf. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 4-6; 13.

The priest is first of all a *minister of the Word of God*. He is consecrated and sent forth to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom to all, calling every person to the obedience of faith and leading believers to an ever-increasing knowledge of and communion in the mystery of God, as revealed and communicated to us in Christ. For this reason, the priest himself ought first of all to develop a great personal familiarity with the word of God. Knowledge of its linguistic or exegetical aspects, though certainly necessary, is not enough. He needs to approach the word with a docile and prayerful heart, so that it may deeply penetrate his thoughts and feelings and bring about a new outlook in him — “the mind of Christ” (1 Co 2:16) — such that his words and his choices and attitudes may become ever more a reflection, a proclamation and a witness to the Gospel. Only if he “abides” in the word will the priest become a perfect disciple of the Lord. Only then will he know the truth and be set truly free, overcoming every conditioning which is contrary or foreign to the Gospel (cf. Jn 8:31-32). The priest ought to be the first “believer” in the word, while being fully aware that the words of his ministry are not “his,” but those of the One who sent him. He is not the master of the word, but its servant. He is not the sole possessor of the word; in its regard he is in debt to the People of God. Precisely because he can and does evangelize, the priest like every other member of the Church, ought to grow in awareness that he himself is continually in need of being evangelized.⁶⁷ He proclaims the word in his capacity as “minister,” as a sharer in the prophetic authority of Christ and the Church. As a result, in order that he himself may possess and give to the faithful the guarantee that he is transmitting the Gospel in its fullness, the priest is called to develop a special sensitivity, love and docility to the living Tradition of the Church and to her Magisterium. These are not foreign to the word, but serve its proper interpretation and preserve its authentic meaning.⁶⁸

It is above all in the *celebration of the Sacraments* and in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours that the priest is called to live and witness to the deep unity between the exercise of his ministry and his spiritual life. The gift of grace offered to the Church becomes the principle of holiness and a call to sanctifica-

⁶⁷Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (8 December 1975), 15: loc. cit., 13-15.

⁶⁸Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, 8, 10.

tion. For the priest as well, the truly central place, both in his ministry and spiritual life, belongs to the Eucharist, since in it is contained "the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself our Pasch and the living bread which gives life to men through his flesh — that flesh which is given life and gives life through the Holy Spirit. Thus people are invited and led to offer themselves, their works and all creation with Christ."⁶⁹

From the various Sacraments, and in particular from the specific grace proper to each of them, the priest's spiritual life receives certain features. It is built up and molded by the different characteristics and demands of each of the Sacraments as he celebrates them and experiences them.

I would like to make special mention of the Sacrament of Penance, of which priests are the ministers, but ought also to be its beneficiaries, becoming themselves witnesses of God's mercy towards sinners. Once again, I would like to set forth what I wrote in the Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*: "The priest's spiritual and pastoral life, like that of his brothers and sisters, lay and religious, depends, for its quality and fervor, on the frequent and conscientious personal practice of the Sacrament of Penance. The priest's celebration of the Eucharist and administration of the other Sacraments, his pastoral zeal, his relationship with the faithful, his communion with his brother priests, his collaboration with his Bishop, his life of prayer — in a word, the whole of his priestly existence, suffers an inexorable decline if by negligence or for some other reason he fails to receive the Sacrament of Penance at regular intervals and in a spirit of genuine faith and devotion. If a priest were no longer to go to confession or properly confess his sins, his *priestly being* and his *priestly action* would feel its effects very soon, and this would also be noticed by the community of which he was the pastor."⁷⁰

Finally, the priest is called to express in his life the authority and service of Jesus Christ the Head and Priest of the Church *by encouraging and leading the ecclesial community*, that is, by gath-

⁶⁹Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests, *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5.

⁷⁰Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December 1984), 31, VI: AAS 77 (1985), 265-266.

ering together "the family of God as a fellowship endowed with the spirit of unity" and by leading it "in Christ through the Spirit to God the Father."⁷¹ This *munus regendi* represents a very delicate and complex duty which, in addition to the attention which must be given to a variety of persons and their vocations, also involves the ability to coordinate all the gifts and charisms which the Spirit inspires in the community, to discern them and to put them to good use for the upbuilding of the Church in constant union with the Bishops. This ministry demands of the priest an intense spiritual life, filled with those qualities and virtues which are typical of a person who "presides over" and "leads" a community, of an "elder" in the noblest and richest sense of the word: qualities and virtues such as faithfulness, integrity, consistency, wisdom, a welcoming spirit, friendliness, goodness of heart, decisive firmness in essentials, freedom from overly subjective viewpoints, personal disinterestedness, patience, an enthusiasm for daily tasks, confidence in the value of the hidden workings of grace as manifested in the simple and the poor (*Tt* 1:7-8).

Priestly Life and the Radicalism of the Gospel

27. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (*Lk* 4:18). The Holy Spirit poured out in the Sacrament of Holy Orders is a source of holiness and a call to sanctification. This is the case not only because it configures the priest to Christ, the Head and Shepherd of the Church, entrusting him with a prophetic, priestly and royal mission to be carried out in the name and person of Christ, but also because it inspires and enlivens his daily existence, enriching it with gifts and demands, virtues and incentives which are summed up in pastoral charity. This charity is a synthesis which unifies the values and virtues contained in the Gospel and likewise a power which sustains their development towards Christian perfection.⁷²

For all Christians without exception, the radicalism of the Gospel represents a fundamental, undeniable demand flowing from the call of Christ to follow and imitate him by virtue of the intimate communion of life with him brought about by the Spirit (cf. *Mt* 8:18

⁷¹Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 6.

⁷²Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 42.

ff; 10:37 ff; *Mk* 8:34-38; 10:17-21; *Lk* 9:57 ff). This same demand is made anew to priests, not only because they are "in the forefront" of the Church, inasmuch as they are configured to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, equipped for and committed to ordained ministry, and inspired by pastoral charity. Within and as a manifestation of the radicalism of the Gospel one can find a blossoming of many virtues and ethical demands which are decisive for the pastoral and spiritual life of the priest, such as faith, humility in relation to the mystery of God, mercy and prudence. A particularly significant expression of the radicalism of the Gospel is seen in the different "evangelical counsels" which Jesus proposes in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. *Mt* 5-7), and among them the intimately related counsels of obedience, chastity and poverty.⁷³ The priest is called to live these counsels in accordance with those ways and, more specifically, those goals and that basic meaning which derive from and express his own priestly identity.

28. "Among the virtues most necessary for the priestly ministry must be named that disposition of soul by which priests are always ready to seek not their own will, but the will of him who sent them (cf. *Jn* 4:34; 5:30; 6:38)."⁷⁴ It is in the spiritual life of the priest that obedience takes on certain special characteristics.

First of all, obedience is "*apostolic*" in the sense that it recognizes, loves and serves the Church in her hierarchical structure. Indeed, there can be no genuine priestly ministry except in communion with the Supreme Pontiff and the Episcopal College, especially with one's own diocesan Bishop, who deserves that "filial respect and obedience" promised during the rite of ordination. This "submission" to those invested with ecclesial authority is in no way a kind of humiliation. It flows instead from the responsible freedom of the priest who accepts not only the demands of an organized and organic ecclesial life, but also that grace of discernment and responsibility in ecclesial decisions which was assured by Jesus to his Apostles and their successors, for the sake of faithfully safeguarding the mystery of the Church and serving the structure of the Christian community along its common path towards salvation.

⁷³Cf. *Propositio* 9.

⁷⁴Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 15.

Authentic Christian obedience, when it is properly motivated and lived without servility, helps the priest to exercise in accordance with the Gospel the authority entrusted to him for his work with the People of God: an authority free from authoritarianism or demagogery. Only the person who knows how to obey in Christ is really able to require obedience from others in accordance with the Gospel.

Priestly obedience has also a "*community*" dimension: it is not the obedience of an individual who alone relates to authority, but rather an obedience which is deeply a part of the unity of the presbyterate, which as such is called to cooperate harmoniously with the Bishop and, through him, with Peter's successor.⁷⁵

This aspect of the priest's obedience demands a marked spirit of ascetism, both in the sense of a tendency not to become too bound up in one's own preferences or points of view, and in the sense of giving brother priests the opportunity to make good use of their talents and abilities, setting aside all forms of jealousy, envy and rivalry. Priestly obedience should be one of solidarity, based on belonging to a single presbyterate. Within the presbyterate, this obedience is expressed in co-responsibility regarding directions to be taken and choices to be made.

Finally, priestly obedience has a particular "*pastoral*" character. It is lived in an atmosphere of constant readiness to allow oneself to be taken up, as it were "consumed," by the needs and demands of the flock. These last ought to be truly reasonable and at times they need to be evaluated and tested to see how genuine they are. But it is undeniable that the priest's life is fully "taken up" by the hunger for the Gospel and for faith, hope and love for God and his mystery, a hunger which is more or less consciously present in the People of God entrusted to him.

29. Referring to the evangelical counsels, the Council states that "preeminent among these counsels is that precious gift of divine grace given to some by the Father (cf. *Mt* 19:11; *1 Co* 7:7) in order more easily to devote themselves to God alone with an undivided heart (cf. *1 Co* 7:32-34) in virginity or celibacy. This perfect continence for love of the Kingdom of Heaven has always been held

⁷⁵Cf. *ibid.*

in high esteem by the Church as a sign and stimulus of love, and as a singular source of spiritual fertility in the world.”⁷⁶ In virginity and celibacy, chastity retains its original meaning, that is, of human sexuality lived as a genuine sign of and precious service to the love of communion and gift of self to others. This meaning is fully found in virginity which makes evident, even in the renunciation of marriage, the “nuptial meaning” of the body through a communion and a personal gift to Jesus Christ and his Church which prefigures and anticipates the perfect and final communion of self-giving of the world to come: “In virginity or celibacy, the human being is awaiting, also in a bodily way, the eschatological marriage of Christ with the Church, giving himself or herself completely to the Church in the hope that Christ may give himself to the Church in the full truth of eternal life.”⁷⁷

In this light one can more easily understand and appreciate the reasons behind the centuries-old choice which the Western Church has made and maintained — despite all the difficulties and objections raised down the centuries — of conferring the Order of Presbyter only on men who have given proof that they have been called by God to the gift of chastity in absolute and perpetual celibacy.

The Synod Fathers clearly and forcefully expressed their thought on this matter in an important proposal which deserves to be quoted here in full: “While in no way interfering with the discipline of the Oriental Churches, the Synod, in the conviction that perfect chastity in priestly celibacy is a charism, reminds priests that celibacy is a priceless gift of God for the Church and has a prophetic value for the world today. This Synod strongly reaffirms what the Latin Church and some Oriental Rites require, that is, that the priesthood be conferred only on those men who have received from God the gift of the vocation to celibate chastity (without prejudice to the tradition of some Oriental Churches and particular cases of married clergy who convert to Catholicism, which are admitted as exceptions in Pope Paul VI’s Encyclical on priestly celibacy, No. 42). The Synod does not wish to leave any doubts in the mind of anyone

⁷⁶Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 42.

⁷⁷Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 16: AAS 74 (1982), 98.

regarding the Church's firm will to maintain the law that demands perpetual and freely chosen celibacy for present and future candidates for priestly ordination in the Latin Rite. The Synod would like to see celibacy presented and explained in the fullness of its biblical, theological and spiritual richness, as a precious gift given by God to his Church and as a sign of the Kingdom which is not of this world, a sign of God's love for this world and of the undivided love of the priest for God and for God's People, with the result that celibacy is seen as a positive enrichment of the priesthood."⁷⁸

It is especially important that the priest understand the theological motivation of the Church's law on celibacy. Inasmuch as it is a law, it expresses *the Church's will*, even before the will of the subject expressed by his readiness. But the will of the Church finds its ultimate motivation in the *link between celibacy and sacred Ordination*, which configures the priest to Jesus Christ the Head and Spouse of the Church. The Church, as the Spouse of Jesus Christ, wishes to be loved by the priest in the total and exclusive manner in which Jesus Christ her Head and Spouse loved her. Priestly celibacy, then, is the gift of self *in and with Christ* to his Church and expresses the priest's service to the Church in and with the Lord.

For an adequate priestly spiritual life, celibacy ought not to be considered and lived as an isolated or purely negative element, but as one aspect of a positive, specific and characteristic approach to being a priest. Leaving father and mother, the priest follows Jesus the Good Shepherd, in an apostolic communion, in the service of the People of God. Celibacy, then, is to be welcomed and continually renewed with a free and loving decision as a priceless gift from God, as an "incentive to pastoral charity,"⁷⁹ as a singular sharing in God's fatherhood and in the fruitfulness of the Church, and as a witness to the world of the eschatological Kingdom. To put into practice all the moral, pastoral and spiritual demands of priestly celibacy it is absolutely necessary that the priest pray humbly and trustingly, as the Council points out: "In the world today, many people call perfect continence impossible. The more they do so, the more humbly and

⁷⁸*Propositio 11.*

⁷⁹Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 16.

perseveringly priests should join with the Church in praying for the grace of fidelity. It is never denied to those who ask. At the same time let priests make use of all the supernatural and natural helps which are now available to all."⁸⁰ Once again it is prayer, together with the Church's Sacraments and ascetical practice, which will provide hope in difficulties, forgiveness in failings, and confidence and courage in resuming the journey.

30. On the subject of *evangelical poverty*, the Synod Fathers gave a concise yet important description, presenting it as "the subjection of all goods to the supreme good of God and his Kingdom."⁸¹ In reality, only the person who contemplates and lives the mystery of God as the one and supreme good, as the true and definitive treasure can understand and practice poverty, which is certainly not a matter of despising or rejecting material goods, but of a loving and responsible use of these goods and at the same time an ability to renounce them with great interior freedom, that is, with reference to God and his plan.

Poverty for the priest, by virtue of his sacramental configuration to Christ, the Head and Shepherd, takes on specific "pastoral" connotations which the Synod Fathers took up from the Council's teaching⁸² and further developed. Among other things, they wrote: "Priests, following the example of Christ who rich though he was became poor for love of us (2 Co 8:9), should consider the poor and the weakest as people entrusted in a special way to them and they should be capable of witnessing to poverty with a simple and austere lifestyle, having learned the generous renunciation of superfluous things (*Optatam Totius*, 9; *C.I.C.*, can. 282)."⁸³

It is true that "the workman deserves his wages" (*Lk* 10:7) and that "the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the Gospel should get their living by the Gospel" (*1 Co* 9:14), but it is no less true that this right of the Apostle can in no way be confused with attempts of any kind to condition service to the Gospel and the Church upon the advantages and interest which can derive from

⁸⁰*Ibid.*

⁸¹*Propositio* 8.

⁸²Cf. Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 17.

⁸³*Propositio* 10.

it. Poverty alone ensures that the priest remains available to be sent wherever his work will be most useful and needed, even at the cost of personal sacrifice. It is a condition and essential premise of the Apostle's docility to the Spirit, making him ready to "go forth," without traveling bag or personal ties, following only the will of the Master (cf. *Lk* 9:57-62; *Mk* 10:17-22).

Being personally involved in the life of the community and being responsible for it, the priest should also offer the witness of a total "honesty" in the administration of the goods of the community, which he will never treat as if they were his own property, but rather something for which he will be held accountable by God and his brothers and sisters, especially the poor. Moreover, his awareness of belonging to the one presbyterate will be an incentive for the priest to commit himself to promoting both a more equitable distribution of goods among his fellow priests and a certain common use of goods (cf. *Ac* 2:42-47).

The interior freedom which is safeguarded and nourished by evangelical poverty will help the priest to stand beside the underprivileged, to practice solidarity with their efforts to create a more just society, to be more sensitive and capable of understanding and discerning realities involving the economic and social aspects of life, and to promote a preferential option for the poor. The latter, while excluding no one from the proclamation and gift of salvation, will assist him in gently approaching the poor, sinners, and all those on the margins of society, following the model given by Jesus in carrying out his prophetic and priestly ministry (cf. *Lk* 4:18).

Nor should the prophetic significance of priestly poverty be forgotten, so urgently needed in affluent and consumeristic societies: "A truly poor priest is indeed a specific sign of separation from, disavowal of and non-submission to the tyranny of a contemporary world which puts all its trust in money and in material security."⁸⁴

Jesus Christ, who brought his pastoral charity to perfection on the Cross with a complete exterior and interior emptying of self, is both the model and source of the virtues of obedience, chastity and poverty which the priest is called to live out as an expression of his

⁸⁴*Ibid.*

pastoral charity for his brothers and sisters. In accordance with Saint Paul's words to the Christians at Philippi, the priest should have "the mind which was in Christ Jesus," emptying himself of his own "self," so as to discover, in a charity which is obedient, chaste and poor, the royal road of union with God and unity with his brothers and sisters (cf. *Ph* 2:5).

Membership in and dedication to the Particular Church

31. Like every authentically Christian spiritual life, the spiritual life of the priest has an *essential and undeniable ecclesial dimension* which is a sharing in the holiness of the Church herself, which we profess in the Creed to be a "Communion of Saints." The holiness of the Christian has its source in the holiness of the Church; it expresses that holiness and at the same time enriches it. This ecclesial dimension takes on special forms, purposes and meanings in the spiritual life of the priest by virtue of his specific relation to the Church, always as a result of his configuration to Christ the Head and Shepherd, his ordained ministry and his pastoral charity.

In this perspective, it is necessary to consider the priest's membership in and dedication to a particular Church. These two factors are not the result of purely organizational and disciplinary needs. On the contrary, the priest's relationship with his Bishop in the one presbyterate, his sharing in the Bishop's ecclesial concern, and his devotion to the evangelical care of the People of God in the specific historical and contextual conditions of a particular Church are elements which must be taken into account in sketching the proper configuration of the priest and his spiritual life. In this sense, "incardination" cannot be confined to a purely juridical bond, but also involves a set of attitudes as well as spiritual and pastoral decisions which help to fill out the specific features of the priestly vocation.

The priest needs to be aware that his "being in a particular Church" constitutes by its very nature a significant element in his living a Christian spirituality. In this sense, the priest finds precisely in his belonging to and dedication to the particular Church a wealth of meaning, criteria for discernment and action which shape both his pastoral mission and his spiritual life.

Other insights or reference to other traditions of spiritual life can contribute to the priest's journey towards perfection, for these

are capable of enriching the life of individual priests as well as enlivening the presbyterate with precious spiritual gifts. Such is the case with many old and new Church associations which welcome priests into their spiritual family: from societies of apostolic life to priestly secular institutes, and from various forms of spiritual communion and sharing to ecclesial Movements. Priests who belong to religious orders and congregations represent a spiritual enrichment for the entire diocesan presbyterate, to which they contribute specific charisms and special ministries, stimulating the particular Church by their presence to be more intensely open to the Church throughout the world.⁸⁵

The priest's membership in a particular Church and his dedication — even to the gift of his life — to the upbuilding of the Church, "in the person" of Christ the Head and Shepherd, in service of the entire Christian community and in a generous and filial relationship with the Bishop, must be strengthened by every charism which becomes part of his priestly life or surrounds it.⁸⁶

For the abundance of the Spirit's gifts to be welcomed with joy and allowed to bear fruit for the glory of God and the good of the entire Church, each person is required first to have a knowledge and discernment of his or her own charisms and those of others, and always to use these charisms with Christian humility, with firm self-control and with the intention, above all else, to help build up the entire community which each particular charism is meant to serve. Moreover, all are required to make a sincere effort to live in mutual esteem, to respect others and to hold in esteem all the positive and legitimate diversities present in the presbyterate. This too constitutes part of the priest's spiritual life and his continual practice of asceticism.

32. Membership in and dedication to a particular Church does not limit the activity and life of the presbyterate to that Church: a restriction of this sort is not possible, given the very nature both of the particular Church⁸⁷ and of the priestly ministry. In this regard

⁸⁵Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes and Sacred Congregation for Bishops, Directives for Mutual Relations between Bishops and Religious in the Church *Mutuae Relationes*, (14 May 1978), 18: AAS 70 1978, 484-485.

⁸⁶Cf. *Propositio* 25; 38.

⁸⁷Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 23.

the Council teaches that "the spiritual gift which priests received at their ordination prepares them not for any limited or narrow mission but for the widest scope of the universal mission of salvation 'to the end of the earth' (Ac 1:8). For every priestly ministry shares in the universality of the mission entrusted by Christ to his Apostles."⁸⁸

It thus follows that the spiritual life of the priest should be profoundly marked by a missionary zeal and dynamism. In the exercise of their ministry and the witness of their lives, priests have the duty to form the community entrusted to them as a truly missionary community. As I wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, "all priests must have the mind and heart of missionaries open to the needs of the Church and the world, with concern for those farthest away, and especially for the non-Christian groups in their own area. They should have at heart, in their prayers and particularly at the Eucharistic Sacrifice the concern of the whole Church for all of humanity."⁸⁹

If the lives of priests are generously inspired by this missionary spirit, it will be easier to respond to that increasingly serious demand of the Church today which arises from the unequal distribution of the clergy. In this regard, the Council was both quite clear and forceful: "Let priests remember then that they must have at heart the care of all the Churches. Hence priests belonging to dioceses which are rich in vocations should show themselves willing and ready, with the permission or at the urging of their own Bishop, to exercise their ministry in other regions, missions, or activities which suffer from a shortage of clergy."⁹⁰

"Renew in them the outpouring of your Spirit of holiness"

33. "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. . ." (*Lk* 4:18). Even today Christ makes these words which he proclaimed in the synagogue of Naza-

⁸⁸Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 10; cf. *Propositio* 12.

⁸⁹Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris Missio* (7 December 1990), 67: AAS 83 (1991), 315-316.

⁹⁰Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 10.

reth echo in our priestly hearts. Indeed, our faith reveals to us the presence of the Spirit of Christ at work in our being, in our acting, and in our living, just as the Sacrament of Orders has configured, equipped and molded it.

Yes, the spirit of the Lord is the principal agent in our spiritual life. He creates our "new heart," inspires it and guides it with the "new law" of love, of pastoral charity. For the development of the spiritual life it is essential to be aware that the priest will never lack the grace of the Holy Spirit, as a totally gratuitous gift and as a task which he is called to undertake. Awareness of this gift is the foundation and support of the priest's unflagging trust amid the difficulties, temptations and weaknesses which he will meet along his spiritual path.

Here I would repeat to all priests what I said to so many of them on another occasion: "the priestly vocation is essentially a call to holiness, in the form which derives from the Sacrament of Orders. Holiness is intimacy with God; it is the imitation of Christ, who was poor, chaste and humble; it is unreserved love for souls and a giving of oneself on their behalf and for their true good; it is love for the Church which is holy and wants us to be holy, because this is the mission that Christ entrusted to her. Each one of you should also be holy in order to help your brothers and sisters to pursue their vocation to holiness.

"How can we fail to reflect on. . . the essential role that the Holy Spirit carries out in this particular call to holiness which is proper to the priestly ministry? Let us remember the words of the rite of priestly ordination which are considered to be central in the sacramental formula: 'Almighty Father, give these your sons, the dignity of the priesthood. Renew in them the outpouring of your Spirit of holiness. O Lord, may they fulfill the ministry of the second degree of priesthood received from you and by their example may they lead all to upright conduct of life.'

"Beloved, through Ordination, you have received the same Spirit of Christ, who makes you like him, so that you can act in his name and so that his very mind and heart might live in you. This intimate communion with the Spirit of Christ, while guaranteeing the efficacy of the sacramental actions which you perform *in per-*

sona Christi seeks to be expressed in fervent prayer, in integrity of life, in the pastoral charity of a ministry tirelessly spending itself for the salvation of the brethren. In a word, it calls for your personal sanctification."⁹¹

⁹¹*Homily* to 5,000 priests from throughout the world (9 October 1984), 2: *Insegnamenti* VII/2 (1984), 839.

Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

Introduction

1. The concept of *communion* (*koinonia*), which appears with a certain prominence in the texts of the Second Vatican Council,¹ is very suitable for expressing the core of the mystery of the Church, and can certainly be a key for the renewal of Catholic ecclesiology.² A deeper appreciation of the fact that the Church is a communion is, indeed, a task of special importance, which provides ample latitude for theological reflection on the mystery of the Church, "whose nature is such that it always admits new and deeper exploring."³ However, some approaches to ecclesiology suffer from a clearly inadequate awareness of the Church as a *mystery of*

¹Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 4,8,13-15, 18, 21, 24-25; Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Verbum*, no. 10; Dogmatic Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 32; Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, nos. 2-4, 14-15, 17-19, 22.

²Cf. Synod of Bishops, Second Extraordinary Assembly (1985), *Relatio Finalis*, II, C, 1.

³Paul VI, *Opening Address of the Second Session of the Second Vatican Council*. Sept. 29, 1963: AAS 55 (1963) p. 848. Cf., for example, perspectives for further reflection indicated by the International Theological Commission, in its "Thema Selecta de Ecclesiologia": *Documenta* (1969-1985), Lib. Ed. Vaticana 1988, pp. 46?

communion, especially insofar as they have not sufficiently integrated the concept of *communion* with the concepts of *People of God* and *Body of Christ*, and have not given due importance to the relationship between the Church as *communion* and the Church as *sacrament*.

2. Bearing in mind the doctrinal, pastoral and ecumenical importance of the different aspects regarding the Church understood as communion, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has considered it opportune, by means of this Letter, to recall briefly and clarify, where necessary, some of the fundamental elements that are to be considered already settled also by those who undertake the hoped-for theological investigation.

I. The Church, a mystery of communion

3. The concept of *communion* lies "at the heart of the Church's self-understanding,"⁴ insofar as it is the mystery of the personal union of each human being with the divine Trinity and with the rest of mankind, initiated with the faith,⁵ and, having begun as a reality in the Church on earth, is directed towards its eschatological fulfillment in the heavenly Church.⁶

If the concept of *communion*, which is not a univocal one, is to serve as a key to ecclesiology, it has to be understood within the teaching of the Bible and the patristic tradition, in which *communion* always involves double dimension: the vertical (communion with God) and the *horizontal* (communion among men). It is essential to the Christian understanding of *communion* that it be recognized above all as a gift from God, as a fruit of God's initiative carried out in the paschal mystery. The new relationship between man and God, that has been established in Christ and is communicated through the sacraments, also extends to a new relationship of men among them-

⁴John Paul II, "Address to the Bishops of the United States of America," Sept. 16, 1987, no. 1: *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* X, 3 (1987), 553.

⁵*1 Jn* 1:3: "that which we have seen and heard, we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." Cf. also *1 Co* 1:9; John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidelis Laici*, Dec. 30, 1988, no. 19: AAS 81 (1989), 422-424; Synod of Bishops (1985), *Relatio Finalis*, II, C, 1.

⁶Cf. *Ph* 3:20-21; *Col* 3:1-4; Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 48.

selves. As a result, the concept of *communion* should be such as to express both the sacramental nature of the Church while "we are away from the Lord,"⁷ and also the particular unity which makes the faithful into members of one and the same body, the mystical body of Christ,⁸ an organically structured community,⁹ "a people brought into one by the unity of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,"¹⁰ and endowed with suitable means for its visible and social union.¹¹

4. *Ecclesial communion is at the same time both invisible and visible.* As an invisible reality, it is the communion of each human being with the Father through Christ in the Holy Spirit, and with the others who are fellow sharers in the divine nature¹² in the passion of Christ,¹³ in the same faith,¹⁴ in the same spirit.¹⁵ In the Church on earth, there is an intimate relationship between this invisible communion and the visible communion in the teaching of the apostles, in the sacraments and in the hierarchical order. By means of these divine gifts, which are very visible realities, Christ carries out in different ways in history his prophetic, priestly and kingly *functions* for the salvation of mankind.¹⁶ This link between the invisible and visible elements of ecclesial communion constitutes the Church as the *sacrament* of salvation.

From this sacramentality it follows that the Church is not a reality closed in on herself. Rather, she is permanently open to missionary and ecumenical endeavor, for she is sent to the world to announce and witness, to make present and spread the mystery of communion which is essential to her, and to gather together all

⁷2 Co 5:6. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 1.

⁸Cf. *ibid.* no. 7; Pius XII, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, June 29, 1943; AAS 35 (1943), 200 ff.

⁹Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* no. 11, par. 1.

¹⁰St. Cyprian, *De Oratone Dominica*, 23: PL 4, 553; cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4, par. 2.

¹¹Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 9, par. 3.

¹²Cf. 2 Pt 1:4.

¹³Cf. 2 Co 1:7.

¹⁴Cf. Ep 4:13; Phm 6.

¹⁵Cf. Ph 2:1.

¹⁶Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 25-27.

people and all things into Christ¹⁷ so as to be for all an "inseparable sacrament of unity."¹⁸

5. Ecclesial communion, into which each individual is introduced by faith and by Baptism,¹⁹ has its root and center in the Holy Eucharist. Indeed, Baptism is an incorporation into a body that the risen Lord builds up and keeps alive through the Eucharist, so that this body can truly be called the body of Christ. The Eucharist is the creative force and source of *communion* among the members of the Church, precisely because it unites each one of them with Christ himself: "Really sharing in the body of the Lord in the breaking of the Eucharistic bread, we are taken up into communion with him and with one another. 'Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread' (1 Co 10:17)."²⁰

Hence, the Pauline expression *the Church is the body of Christ* means that the Eucharist, in which the Lord gives us his body and transforms us into one body,²¹ is where the Church expresses herself permanently in most essential form. While present everywhere, she is yet only one, just as Christ is *one*.

6. The Church is a *communion of saints*, to use a traditional expression that is found in the Latin versions of the Apostles' Creed from the end of the fourth century.²² The common visible sharing in the goods of salvation (*the holy things*), especially in the Eucharist, is the source of the invisible communion among the sharers (the

¹⁷Cf. *Mt* 28:19-20; *Jn* 17:21-23; *Ep* 1:10; Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 9, par. 2; 13; 17; Decree *Ad Gentes*, nos. 1, 5; St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 16, 6 and 22, 1-3: *PG* 7, 925-926 and 955-958.

¹⁸St. Cyprian, *Epist. ad Magnum* 6: *PL* 3, 1142.

¹⁹*Ep* 4:4-5: "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism." Cf. also *Mk* 16:16.

²⁰Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 7, par. 2. The Eucharist is the sacrament "through which in the present age the Church is made" (St. Augustine, *Contra Faustum*, 12, 20: *PL* 42, 265). "Our sharing in the body and blood of Christ leads to no other end than that of transforming us into that which we receive" (St. Leo the Great, *Sermo* 63, 7: *PL* 54, 357).

²¹Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 3 and 11, par. 1; St. John Chrysostom, *In 1 Co. Hom.*, 24, 2: *PG* 61, 200.

²²Cf. *DS* 19, 26-30.

saints). This communion brings with it a spiritual solidarity among the members of the Church, insofar as they are members of one same body,²³ and it fosters their effective union in charity by constituting them "one heart and soul."²⁴ Communion tends also towards union in prayer,²⁵ inspired in all by one and the same Spirit,²⁶ the Holy Spirit "who fills and unites and whole Church."²⁷

In its invisible elements, this communion exists not only among the members of the pilgrim Church on earth, but also between these and all who, having passed from this world in the grace of the Lord, belong to the heavenly Church or will be incorporated into her after having been fully purified.²⁸ This means, among other things, that there is a *mutual relationship* between the pilgrim Church on earth and the heavenly Church in the historical-redemptive mission. Hence the ecclesiological importance not only of Christ's intercession on behalf of his members,²⁹ but also of that of the saints and, in an eminent fashion, of the Blessed Virgin Mary.³⁰ *Devotion to the saints*, which is such a strong feature of the Christian people, can thus be seen to correspond in its very essence to the profound reality of the Church as a mystery of communion.

II. Universal and particular Churches

7. The *Church of Christ*, which we profess in the Creed to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic, is the universal Church, that is, the worldwide community of the disciples of the Lord,³¹ which is present and active amid the particular characteristics and the diversity of persons, groups, times and places. Among these manifold

²³Cf. *1 Co* 12:25-27; *Ep* 1:22-23; 3: 3-6.

²⁴*Ac* 4:32.

²⁵Cf. *Ac* 2:42.

²⁶Cf. *Rm* 8:15-16, 26; *Ga* 4:6; Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 4.

²⁷St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 29, a. 4. c. Indeed, "lifted up on the cross and glorified, the Lord Jesus poured forth the Spirit whom he had promised, and through whom he has called and gathered together the people of the New Covenant, which is the Church, into a unity of faith, hope and charity" (Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 2, par. 2).

²⁸Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 49.

²⁹Cf. *Heb* 7:25.

³⁰Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 50, 66.

³¹Cf. *Mt* 16:18; *1 Co* 12:28.

particular expressions of the saving presence of the one Church of Christ, there are to be found, from the times of the apostles on, those entities which are in themselves *Churches*,³² because, although they are particular, the universal Church becomes present in them with all her essential elements.³³ They are therefore constituted "after the model of the universal Church,"³⁴ and each of them is "a portion of the People of God entrusted to a bishop to be guided by him with the assistance of his clergy."³⁵

8. The universal Church is therefore the *body of the Churches*.³⁶ Hence it is possible to apply the concept of communion in *analogous fashion* to the union existing among particular Churches, and to see the universal Church as a communion of Churches. Sometimes, however, the idea of a "communion of particular Churches" is presented in such a way as to weaken the concept of the unity of the Church at the visible and institutional level. Thus it is asserted that every particular Church is a subject complete in itself, and that the universal Church is the result of a *reciprocal recognition* on the part of the particular Churches. This ecclesiological unilateralism, which impoverishes not only the concept of the universal Church but also that of the particular Church, betrays an insufficient understanding of the concept of communion. As history shows, when a particular Church has sought to become self-sufficient and has weakened its real communion with the universal Church and with its living and visible center, its internal unity suffers too, and it finds itself in danger of losing its own freedom in the face of the various forces of enslavement and exploitation.³⁷

9. In order to grasp the true meaning of the analogical application of the term *communion* to the particular Churches taken

³²Cf. Ac 8:1; 11:22; 1 Co 1:2; 16:19; Ga 1:22; Rv 2:1, 8.

³³Cf. Pontifical Biblical Commission, *Unite et Diversite dans l'Eglise*, Lib. Ed. Vaticana 1989, especially, pp. 14-28.

³⁴Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23, par. 1; cf. Decree *Ad Gentes*, no. 20, par. 1.

³⁵Decree *Christus Dominus*, no. 11, par. 1.

³⁶Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23, par. 2. Cf. St. Hilary of Poitiers, *In Psalm.*, 14, 3: PL 9, 301; St. Gregory the Great, *Moralia*, IV, 7, 12: PL 75, 643.

³⁷Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, Dec. 8, 1975, no. 64, par. 2: AAS 68 (1976), 54-55.

as a whole, one must bear in mind above all that the particular Churches, insofar as they are "part of the one Church of Christ,"³⁸ have a special relationship of "mutual interiority"³⁹ with the whole, that is, with the universal Church, because in every particular Church "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is truly present and active."⁴⁰ For the reason, "the universal Church cannot be conceived as the sum of the particular Churches, or as a federation of particular Churches."⁴¹ It is not the result of the communion of the Churches, but, in its essential mystery, it is a reality *ontologically* and *temporally* prior to every *individual* particular Church.

Indeed, according to the Fathers, *ontologically*, the Church-mystery, the Church that is one and unique, precedes creation,⁴² and gives birth to the particular Churches as her daughters. She expresses herself in them; she is the mother and not the offspring of the particular Churches. Furthermore, the Church is manifest, *temporally*, on the day of Pentecost in the community of the one hundred and twenty gathered around Mary and the twelve apostles, the representatives of the one unique Church and the founders-to-be of the local Churches, who have a mission directed to the world. From the first the Church *speaks all languages*.⁴³

From the Church, which in its origins and its first manifestation is universal, have arisen the different local Churches, as particular expressions of the one unique Church of Jesus Christ. Arising *within* and *out of* the universal Church, they have their ecclesiality in her and from her. Hence the formula of the Second Vatican Council: *The Church in and formed out of the Churches (Ecclesiae in et ex Eccle-*

³⁸Decree *Christus Dominus*, no. 6, par. 3.

³⁹John Paul II, "Address to the Roman Curia," Dec. 20, 1990, no. 9: AAS 83 (1991), 745-747.

⁴⁰Decree *Christus Dominus*, no. 11, par. 1.

⁴¹John Paul II, "Address to the Bishops of the United States of America," Sept. 16, 1987, no. 3, in *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* X, 555.

⁴²Cf. St. Clement of Rome, *Epist. II ad Cor.*, 4:2: Funck, 1, 200; Shepherd of Hermas, *Vis. 2, 4*: PG 2, 897-900.

⁴³Cf. Ac 2:1ff. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 17, 2 (PG 7, 929-930): "at Pentecost (...) all nations (...) had become a marvelous choir to intone a hymn of praise to God in perfect harmony, because the Holy Spirit had brought distances to nought, eliminated discordant notes and transformed the varieties of the peoples into the first-fruits to be offered to the Father." Cf. also St. Fulgentius of Ruspe, *Sermo 8 in Pentecoste*, 2-3: PL 65, 743-744.

siis),⁴⁴ is inseparable from this other formula: *The Churches in and formed out of the Church (Ecclesiae in et ex Ecclessia)*.⁴⁵ Clearly the relationship between the universal Church and the particular Churches is a mystery and cannot be compared to that which exists between the whole and the parts in a purely human group or society.

10. Every member of the faithful, through faith and Baptism, is inserted into the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. He does not belong to the universal Church in a *mediate way*, through belonging to a particular Church, but in an *immediate way*, even though entry into and life within the universal Church are necessarily brought about in a particular Church. From the point of view of the Church understood as communion, the universal *communion of the faithful* and the *communion of the Churches* are not consequences of one another but constitute the same reality seen from different viewpoints.

Moreover, one's *belonging* to a particular Church never conflicts with the reality that *in the Church no one is a stranger*.⁴⁶ Each member of the faithful, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist, is in *his Church*, in the Church of Christ, regardless of whether or not he belongs, according to canon law, to the diocese, parish or other particular community where the celebration takes place. In this sense, without impinging on the necessary regulations regarding juridical dependence,⁴⁷ whoever belongs to one particular Church belongs to all the Churches, since belonging to the *communion*, like belonging to the Church, is never simply particular, but by its very nature is always universal.⁴⁸

⁴⁴Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23, par. 1: "[the particular Churches]... it is in these and formed out of them that the one and unique Catholic Church exists." This doctrine develops in the same line of continuity what had been stated previously, for example by Pius X, Encyclical *Mystici Corporis*, AAS 35 (1943), 211: "out of which the one Catholic Church exists and is composed."

⁴⁵Cf. John Paul II, "Address to the Roman Curia," Dec. 20, 1990, no. 9: AAS 83 (1981), 745-747.

⁴⁶Cf. *Ga* 3:28.

⁴⁷Cf., for example, Code of Canon Law, can. 107.

⁴⁸St. John Chrysostom, *In Ioann. Hom.*, 65, 1 (PG 59, 361): "whoever is in Rome knows that the Indians are his member." Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13, par. 2.

III. Communion of the Churches, Eucharist and episcopate

11. Unity or communion between the particular Churches in the universal Church, is rooted not only in the same faith and in the common Baptism, but above all in the Eucharist and in the episcopate.

It is rooted in the Eucharist because the Eucharistic sacrifice, while always offered in a particular community, is never a celebration of that community alone. In fact, the community, in receiving the Eucharistic presence of the Lord, receives the entire gift of salvation and shows, even in its lasting visible particular form, that it is the image and true presence of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.⁴⁹

The rediscovery of a *Eucharistic ecclesiology*, though being of undoubted value, has however sometimes placed one-sided emphasis on the principle of the local Church. It is claimed that, where the Eucharist is celebrated, the totality of the mystery of the Church would be made present in such a way as to render any other principle of unity or universality inessential. Other conceptions, under different theological influences, present this particular view of the Church in an even more radical form, going as far as to hold that gathering together in the name of Jesus (cf. *Mt* 18:20) is the same as generating the Church. The assembly which in the name of Christ becomes a community, would hold within itself the powers of the Church, including power as regards the Eucharist. The Church, some say, would arise "from the base." These and other similar errors do not take sufficiently into account that it is precisely the Eucharist that renders all self-sufficiency on the part of the particular Churches impossible. Indeed, the oneness and indivisibility of the Eucharistic body of the Lord implies the oneness of his mystical body, which is the one and indivisible Church. From the Eucharistic center arises the necessary openness of every celebrating community, of every particular Church. By allowing itself to be drawn into the open arms of the Lord, it achieves insertion into his one and undivided body. For this reason too, the existence of the Petrine ministry, which is a foundation of the unity of the episcopate and of the universal Church, bears a profound correspondence to the Eucharistic character of the Church.

⁴⁹Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 26, par. 1; St. Augustine, *In Ioann. Ev. Tract.*, 26, 13: *PL* 35, 1612-1613.

12. In fact, the unity of the Church is also rooted in the unity of the episcopate.⁵⁰ As the very idea of the *body* of the Churches calls for the existence of a Church that is head of the Churches, which is precisely the Church of Rome, "foremost in the universal communion of charity,"⁵¹ so too the unity of the episcopate involves the existence of a bishop who is head of the body or *college of bishops*, namely the Roman Pontiff.⁵² Of the unity of the episcopate, as also of the unity of the entire Church, "the Roman Pontiff, as the successor of Peter, is the perpetual and visible source and foundation."⁵³ This unity of the episcopate is perpetuated through the centuries by means of the *apostolic succession*, and is also the foundation of the identity of the Church of every age with the Church built by Christ upon Peter and upon the other apostles.⁵⁴

13. The bishop is a visible source and foundation of the unity of the particular Church entrusted to his pastoral ministry.⁵⁵ But for each particular Church to be fully Church, that is, the particular presence of the universal Church with all its essential elements, and hence constituted *after the model of the universal Church*, there must be present in it, as a proper element, the supreme authority of the Church: the episcopal college "together with their head, the Supreme Pontiff, and never apart from him."⁵⁶ The primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the episcopal college are proper elements of the universal Church that are "not derived from the particularity of the Churches,"⁵⁷ but are nevertheless interior to each particular Church. Consequently "we must see the *ministry of the successor of Peter*, not

⁵⁰Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 18, par. 2; 21, par. 2; 22 par. 1. Cf. also St. Cyprian, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 5: PL 4, 516-517; St. Augustine, *In Ioann Ev. Tract.*, 46, 5: PL 35, 1730.

⁵¹St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epist. ad. Rom.*, prol.: PG 5, 685; cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13, par. 3.

⁵²Cf. Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium*, no. 22, par. 2.

⁵³*Ibid.*, no. 23, par. 1. Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*: Ds 3051-3057; St. Cyprian, *De Unitate Ecclesiae*, 4: PL 4, 512-515.

⁵⁴Cf. Dogmatic Constitution no. 20; St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, III, 3, 1-3: PG 7, 848-849; St. Cyprian, *Epist.* 27, 1: PL 4, 305-306; St. Augustine, *Contra Advers. Legis et Prophet.*, 1, 20, 39: PL 42, 626.

⁵⁵Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23, par. 1.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, no. 22, par. 2; cf. also no. 19.

⁵⁷John Paul II, "Address to the Roman Curia," December 20, 1990, no. 9: AAS 83 (1991), 745-747.

only as a 'global' service, reaching each particular Church from 'outside,' as it were, but as belonging already to the essence of each particular Church from 'within.'⁵⁸ Indeed, the ministry of the primacy involves, in essence, a truly episcopal power, which is not only supreme, full and universal, but also *immediate*, over all, whether pastors or other faithful.⁵⁹ The ministry of the successor of interior to each particular Church is a necessary expression of that fundamental *mutual interiority* between universal Church and particular Church.⁶⁰

14. The unity of the Eucharist and the unity of the episcopate *with Peter and under Peter* are not independent roots of the unity of the Church, since Christ instituted the Eucharist and the episcopate as essentially interlinked realities.⁶¹ The episcopate is one, just as the Eucharist is *one*: the one sacrifice of the Christ, dead and risen. The liturgy expresses this reality in various ways, showing, for example, that every celebration of the Eucharist is performed in union not only with the proper bishop, but also with the pope, with the episcopal order, with all the clergy, and with the entire people.⁶² Every valid celebration of the Eucharist expresses this universal communion with *Peter* and with the whole Church, or *objectively* calls for it, as in the case of the Christian Churches separated from Rome.⁶³

IV. Unity and diversity in ecclesial communion

15. "The universality of the Church involves, on the one hand, a most solid unity, and on the other, a *plurality* and a *diversification*, which do not obstruct unity, but rather confer upon it the character of 'communion.'⁶⁴ This plurality refers both to the diversity of ministries, charisms, and forms of life and apostolate within each particu-

⁵⁸John Paul II, "Address to the Bishops of the United States of America," Sept. 16, 1987, no. 4; *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* X, 1987, 556.

⁵⁹Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 3: DS 3064; Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 22, par. 2.

⁶⁰Cf. above, no. 9.

⁶¹Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 26; St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epist. ad Philadel.*, 4: PG 5, 700; *epist. ad Smyrn.*, 8: PG 5, 713.

⁶²Cf. Roman Missal, *Eucharistic Prayer III*.

⁶³Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 8, par. 2.

⁶⁴John Paul II, "Address," General Audience, Sept. 27, 1989, no. 2; *Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II* XII, 2 (1989), 679.

lar Church, and to the diversity of traditions in liturgy and culture among the various particular Churches.⁶⁵

Fostering a unity that does not obstruct diversity, and acknowledging and fostering a diversification that does not obstruct unity but rather enriches it, is a fundamental task of the Roman Pontiff for the whole Church,⁶⁶ and without prejudice to the general law of the Church herself, of each bishop in the particular Church entrusted to his pastoral ministry.⁶⁷ But the building up and safeguarding of this unity, on which diversification confers the character of communion, is also a task of everyone in the Church, because all are called to build it up and preserve it each day, above all by means of that charity which is "the bond of perfection."⁶⁸

16. For a more complete vision of this aspect of ecclesial communion — unity in diversity — one needs to bear in mind that there are institutions and communities established by the apostolic authority for specific pastoral tasks. They belong as such to the universal Church, though their members are also members of the particular Churches where they live and work. The manner of belonging to the particular Churches with its own particular *flexibility*,⁶⁹ takes different juridical forms. But it does not erode the unity of the particular Church founded on the bishop; rather, it helps endow this unity with the interior diversification which is a feature of *communion*.⁷⁰

In the context of the Church understood as communion, consideration should also be given to the many institutes and societies that express the charisms of consecrated life and apostolic life, with which the Holy Spirit enriches the mystical body of Christ. Although these do not belong to the hierarchical structure of the Church, they belong to her life and holiness.⁷¹

⁶⁵Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 23, par. 4.

⁶⁶Cf. *ibid.*, no. 13, par. 3.

⁶⁷Cf. Decree *Christus Dominus*, no. 8, par. 1.

⁶⁸Col 3:14. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Exposit. in Symbol. Apost.*, a. 9: "The Church is one (...) through the unity of charity, because all are joined in the love of God, and among themselves in mutual love."

⁶⁹Cf. above, no. 10.

⁷⁰Cf. above, no. 15.

⁷¹Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 44, par. 4.

Given their supradiocesan character, rooted in the Petrine ministry, all these ecclesial realities are also elements at the service of communion among the various particular Churches.

V. Ecclesial communion and ecumenism

17. "The Church knows that she is joined in many ways to the baptized who are honored by the name of Christian, but who do not however profess the Catholic faith in its entirety or have not preserved unity or communion under the successor of Peter."⁷² Among the non-Catholic Churches and Christian communities, there are indeed to be found many elements of the Church of Christ, which allow us, amid joy and hope, to acknowledge the existence of a certain communion, albeit imperfect.⁷³

This communion exists especially with the Eastern Orthodox Churches which, though separated from the See of Peter, remain united to the Catholic Church by means of very close bonds, such as the apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist, and therefore merit the title of particular Churches.⁷⁴ Indeed, "through the celebration of the Eucharist of the Lord in each of these Churches, the Church of God is built up and grows in stature,"⁷⁵ for in every valid celebration of the Eucharist the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church becomes truly present.⁷⁶

Since, however, communion with the universal Church, represented by Peter's successor, is not an external complement to the particular Church, but one of its internal constituents, the situation of those venerable Christian communities also means that their existence as particular Churches is *wounded*. The wound is even deeper in those ecclesial communities which have not retained the apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist. This in turn also injures the Catholic Church, called by the Lord to become for all "one flock" with "one shepherd,"⁷⁷ in that it hinders the complete fulfillment of her universality in history.

⁷²Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 15.

⁷³Cf. Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, nos. 3, par. 1; 22; cf. also Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 13, par. 4.

⁷⁴Cf. Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio* nos. 14; 15, par. 3.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, no. 15, par. 1.

⁷⁶Cf. above, nos. 5, 14.

⁷⁷*Jn* 10:16.

18. This situation seriously calls for ecumenical commitment on the part of everyone, with a view to achieving full communion in the unity of the Church, that unity "which Christ bestowed on his Church from the beginning. This unity, we believe, subsists in the Catholic Church as something she can never lose, and we hope that it will continue to increase until the end of time."⁷⁸ In this ecumenical commitment, important priorities are prayer, penance, study, dialogue and collaboration, so that, through a new conversion to the Lord, all may be enabled to recognize the continuity of the primacy of Peter in his successors, the Bishops of Rome, and to see the Petrine ministry fulfilled, in the manner intended by the Lord, as a worldwide apostolic service, which is present in all the Churches *from within*, and which, while preserving its substance as a divine institution, can find expression in various ways according to the different circumstances of time and place, as history has shown.

Conclusion

19. The Blessed Virgin Mary is the model of ecclesial communion in faith, in charity and in union with Christ.⁷⁹ "Eternally present in the mystery of Christ,"⁸⁰ she is, in the midst of the apostles, at the very heart of the Church at her birth⁸¹ and of the Church of all ages. Indeed, "the Church was congregated in the upper part (of the cenacle) with Mary, who was the Mother of Jesus, and with his brethren. We cannot therefore speak of the Church unless Mary, the mother of the Lord, is present there, with the Lord's brethren."⁸²

In bringing this *Letter* to a close, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, echoing the final words of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*,⁸³ invites all the bishops and, through them, all the

⁷⁸Decree *Unitatis Redintegratio*, no. 4, par. 3.

⁷⁹Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, nos. 63, 68; St. Ambrose, *Exposit. in Luc.*, 2, 7: PL 15, 1555; St. Isaac of Stella, *Sermo* 27: PL 194, 1778-1779; Rupert of Deutz, *De Vict. Verbi Dei*, 12, 1: PL 169, 1464-1465.

⁸⁰John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, March 25, 1987, no. 19: AAS 79 (1987), 384.

⁸¹Cf. Ac 1:14; John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Mater*, March 25, 1987, no. 26: AAS 79 (1987), 396.

⁸²St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Sermo* 30, 1: "Sources Chretiennes" 164, p. 134. Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis Cultus* Feb. 2, 1974, no. 28: AAS 66 (1974), 141.

⁸³Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, no. 69.

faithful, especially the theologians, to entrust to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin their commitment to communion and to theological reflection upon communion.

The Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect, approved this Letter, adopted in the ordinary meeting of this Congregation, and ordered its publication.

Rome, at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the 28th of May 1992.

JOSEPH Card. RATZINGER
Prefect

+ALBERTO BOVONE
Titular Archbishop of Caesarea in Numidia
Secretary

Some Thoughts on the Rosary*

Roman Carter, O.P.

Much of Scripture, teaches us to trust in God. This trust is best expressed in and through prayer. The Rosary is a prominent form of Catholic prayer. As Father Peyton taught, "the family that prays together, stays together." The slogan is fifty years old and rather threadbare, unless the praying and staying involved are looked at realistically.

How can we be realistic about the Rosary when it seems to be a sort of "vain repetition" of rote words like the pagan prayer condemned by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount? First let us examine these prayers. The *Our Father* is the greatest of prayers for our Lord himself has taught us to say it. The *Hail Mary* is pure St. Luke in the first part and a theological reflection based on Mary's role in prayer in the second. So both of these prayers are basically scriptural. The *Glory Be* states our belief in God expressed in a few very traditional and dogmatically correct words. But the Rosary does not just consist in saying these words of three prayers over and over. No. As a Dominican I must insist that the Rosary involves meditation upon and contemplation of the mysteries of Jesus and his Holy Mother.

*A Homily preached on Wednesday, September 23, 1992, at Santissimo Rosario Parish Church, UST, Manila, before the Miraculous Image of Our Lady of La Naval.

A Protestant author has qualified the Rosary as "Five for Sorrow, Ten for Joy." That is a good idea but not a strict analysis. The Rosary (as we used to pray it everyday in the Dominican Order) has fifteen mysteries: five joyful, five sorrowful and five glorious, or so it seems. Let us look more closely. Two mysteries are about Mary alone before the birth of Christ. Two are about Mary alone after the glorification of Christ. One is about Mary presiding as Mother in the Church at Pentecost. Ten, two thirds are about Christ directly: three of them technically joyful (despite the "sorrow" of his loss in the Temple), five sorrowful and two glorious. In other words a great part of the Rosary is about His suffering and death and its effect. How typical of our Blessed Mother that she leaves the greater part of her Rosary to honor her Son in His Work of Redemption!

As we meditate on the mysteries of the Rosary we can both contemplate their grandeur in Christ and His Mother and apply their truths to ourselves. Your life and mine have some joys, I hope, and much suffering, we must admit. If our lives are Christian they aim at the promise of endless glory, a promise we never forget, however negative our trials, however gladdening our glee. As we grow in God's love we go deeper into each mystery day by day. We not only "recite" the Rosary, we find its mysteries in our lives and are strengthened and built up by them.

Sometimes we have unique privileges. For instance we can pray the Rosary before the La Naval image. Of course it is an image, not a person. Mary is the person addressed as we venerate this image. But let us take care lest we think this image is a mere portrayal of someone in heaven. No. It is a miraculous image. God has used it to answer prayer. God has used it to protect Manila and all the Philippines and all Filipinos from innumerable dangers and woes. Before these finely wrought pieces of ivory, before these precious jewels, before these sumptuous garments for centuries God has been pleased to receive our prayers and those of countless Catholic men and women who lived before we were born. He has received and answered these prayers because they honor Mary, they seek and find her intercession with him and they increase the faith, hope and love of people of all ages, classes and economic circumstances. The La Naval devotion is a family prayer knitting us together before God.

We come here with our joys and find joy. We come here with our sorrows and find our sorrowful Mother and her wounded and dead

Son. We come here in a foretaste of glory (made graphic by the beauty of this miraculous image) and find glory, resurrection and life that transcends our best dreams. We find something ever fresh and new, something to hold onto in danger, trial, earthquake, *lahar* flood. We find Mary who leads us to Jesus whom she holds. We find the love of the Father and strength and purpose in the Holy Spirit. We go on praying and we find All in all!

Message for World Migration Day*

John Paul II

Church Must be 'Neighbor' to All

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1. The daily news almost always tells us about the movement of poor peoples towards wealthy countries, the drama of refugees turned back at the borders, of migrants who are discriminated against and exploited. Such events cannot fail to have an effect on the conscience of Christians who have made the acceptance in solidarity of those in difficulty a distinguishing characteristic of their faith. Emigration has troublesome implications both because families are separated and uprooted from their culture and those who are forced to leave their own land face an uncertain future.

In this context World Migration Day, which all particular Churches are asked to observe on a Sunday determined by the national Episcopal Conference, offers everyone the opportunity to reflect on these problems, to become familiar with their critical aspects and to promote a campaign for sensitization and solidarity.

*Each year the particular Churches are asked to observe World Migration Day, a special day in honor of migrants, on a date selected by the Episcopal Conference. The Holy Father has issued a Message for the occasion, calling attention to the plight of migrants and the need for Christian solidarity on their behalf. *L'Osservatore Romano* N. 31, 3 August 1992.

2. By their concern Christians testify that the community in which the migrants arrives is a community which loves and accepts the stranger with the joy of one who is able to recognize Christ's countenance in that person.

There are many different situations found in the phenomenon of migration today. There are migrants who have been living and working in their adopted society for some time already. These are people who, in the majority of cases, have decided against returning to their native lands, and are waiting to be recognized as an integral part of the society whose fortunes and commitment to economic and social development they share. Hastening their complete integration is an act of justice. No matter where they live, human beings have the right to a country in which they can have their own home and find fulfillment in a context of security, trust, harmony and peace.

Specific provisions are needed in this regard to promote and facilitate procedures for reuniting families, and for adopting juridical norms which will assure an effective equality of treatment with native-born workers.

Another factor of great importance will be the environmental and social rehabilitation of decaying neighborhoods in which the immigrants are often forced to live in marginalization. No one can fail to see how it is necessary, by overcoming problems related to unemployment, to work for the elimination of all types of discrimination in the search for a job, a home and in access to health-care.

3. Much more difficult is the status of undocumented immigrants who are hoping to replace legal migrants as the latter climb the social ladder. No one can deny that the work by which the undocumented aliens participate in the common effort of economic development is a *de facto* form of membership in a society. is a question of giving legitimacy, scope and dignity to this membership through the adoption of appropriate measures.

Not all undocumented immigrants, however, find a job in the rich, diverse context of the industrialized societies. Their adaptation to conditions of hardship is a further confirmation of the humiliating situation to which poverty reduces them in their country. People used to emigrate in order to create better possibilities of life; today people emigrate from many countries merely to survive.

Such a situation also tends to blur the distinction between the concepts of "refugee" and "migrant" to the point that the two categories are merged under the common denomination of "necessity." Even though developed nations are not always able to assimilate all those who emigrate, nonetheless it should be pointed out that the criterion for determining the level that can be supported cannot be based solely on protecting their own prosperity, while failing to take into consideration the needs of persons who are tragically forced to ask for hospitality.

Migration is on the increase today because there is a growing gap in the economic, social and political resources between rich nations and poor ones, there is a smaller number of the former and a growing number of the latter.

In this scenario those who succeed in overcoming "national" barriers can, in a certain sense, consider themselves fortunate because they have been allowed to enjoy the crumbs which fall from the table of today's "Diveses." However, who can begin to count the number of poor "Lazaruses" who cannot benefit from them?

As I mentioned in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*, wealthier nations are invited to take a new look at this very serious problem, conscious that, corresponding to their moral duty to use all their energy to contribute to the solution is the precise right to development enjoyed not only by individuals, but by whole nations (cf. n. 35).

4. It is evident that the citizens of the developing countries are called to exercise a role of primary importance in this task. They must not expect everything from the more favored countries, but should rather see themselves as the instruments of their own liberation. In every field they should have a spirit of initiative, establishing special development programmes to give the greatest possible latitude to their own freedom and prospects for progress, with priority attention paid to literacy and basic education (cf. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, n. 44).

Underdevelopment is not inevitable. In order to overcome it, however, it is necessary to call upon the natural and human resources with which every people is endowed. A very important role obviously falls to the young people who are completing their scientific education in industrialized countries. Because of their capacity to

blend tradition and change, they are the key to an improved economic and social future for those countries.

Migration related to underdevelopment is a challenge which we must face with courage and determination, since it involves the defense of the human person.

As I mentioned in speaking to the participants in the Third World Congress for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, which was held in the Vatican last October, "experience shows that when a nation has the courage to open itself to immigration, it is rewarded with increased prosperity, a solid social renewal and a vigorous impetus toward new economic and human goals" (*L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 14 October 1991, p. 9).

5. Such an observation is best substantiated by the experience connected with the great event of the fifth centenary of the evangelization of America. Without a doubt the countries of the Americas owe the prestigious role which they have today in the concert of nations to their openness to migration.

The celebration of Columbus' endeavors recalls our attention to the contribution of work and learning made by the migrants who throughout these 500 years were welcomed in those lands whose history is closely interwoven with that of migration. If today the Western and American worlds are to some degree a part of the same reality, this is due to the spiritual affinity created by migration.

It is in the name of this brotherhood that, following my Message for Lent this past year, "Called to share the table of creation," I chose to establish the *Populorum Progressio Foundation* to serve the Indios and campesinos of America as a "sign and witness of the Christian desire for fraternity and . . . solidarity" (*L'Osservatore Romano* English edition, 15 April 1992, p. 4). I hope that it may find a generous reception and active response on the part of individuals and institutions, especially within the Catholic world, taking into consideration Catholicism's great importance in the countries of this vast geographic area.

6. Migration has frequently given the particular Churches the opportunity to authenticate and strengthen their own Catholic sense by accepting various ethnic groups and especially by creating communion with them. The Church's unity does not stem from her members having an identical origin, but rather from the Spirit of

Pentecost, who makes all nations a new people whose goal is the kingdom, whose condition is the freedom of sons and daughters, and whose statute is the law of love (cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 9).

The Church's commitment to be the "neighbor" of all peoples is a response to the will of the heavenly Father who embraces everyone in his love. The one goal to which she tends is to call all people to greater solidarity in the new brotherhood in Christ in the family of God.

May the Virgin Mother, who always shows her concern for those in need and is therefore sensitive to all those who personally experience the hardship of migration, comfort and help all those who live far from home and inspire others to sentiments of understanding and acceptance in their regard.

With these wishes I gladly impart to all those who promote the noble, urgent cause of migrants my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of abundant, heavenly favors.

From the Vatican, 31 July 1992, the fourteenth year of my Pontificate.

Pope Establishes 'Day of the Sick'*

*To my Venerable Brother
Cardinal Fiorenzo Angelini
President of the Pontifical Council
for Pastoral Assistance
to Health Care Workers*

1. Looking favorably upon the request you submitted as President of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, and also expressing the hopes of many Episcopal Conferences and national and international Catholic organizations, I want to inform you that I have decided to establish the "World Day of the Sick," which is to be celebrated each year on 11 February, the liturgical memorial of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Lourdes. Indeed, I consider it more opportune than ever to extend to the entire ecclesial community an initiative already observed in some countries and regions that has yielded truly valuable pastoral results.

2. The Church, which throughout the centuries, following Christ's example, has always felt that the obligation to serve the sick and suffering is an integral part of her mission (*Dolentium*

*On May 13, 1992, the Holy Father formally established "World Day of the Sick," to be observed each year on the feast of Our Lady of Lourdes. In his letter instituting the annual observance the Pope explains some of his motives. *L'Osservatore Romano*, N. 21, 27 May 1992.

Hominum, n. 1) is aware that she "today lives a fundamental aspect of her mission in lovingly and generously accepting every human being, especially those who are weak and sick" (*Christifideles Laici*, n. 38). Furthermore, she does not tire of emphasizing the salvific nature of offering up suffering which, experienced in communion with Christ, belongs to the very essence of redemption (*Redemptoris Missio*, n. 78).

The annual celebration of the "World Day of Sick," therefore, has the manifest purpose of making the People of God and, as a consequence, the many Catholic health care institutions and civil society itself, more aware of the necessity of ensuring the best possible care for the infirm; of helping the sick person to make the most of suffering, on the human level, but most of all on the supernatural one; of especially helping the Dioceses, Christian communities and religious families to be involved in the health care apostolate; of enhancing the ever more valuable commitment of volunteers; of reminding people of the importance of the spiritual and moral training of health care workers and, last of all, of creating a better understanding of the importance of religious care for the sick among diocesan and religious priests, as well as among those who live and work at the side of the person in pain.

3. Since it was on 11 February in 1984 that I published the Apostolic Letter *Salvifici Doloris* on the Christian meaning of human suffering and on the same date the following year that I instituted the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers, I believe it is significant that the same day is set for the celebration of the "World Day of the Sick." In fact, "together with Mary, Mother of Christ, who stood beneath the cross, we pause beside all the crosses of contemporary man" (*Salvifici Doloris*, n. 31). And Lourdes, one of the Marian shrines most loved by the Christian people, is both a place and a symbol of hope and grace, characterized by accepting and offering up redemptive suffering.

I therefore ask you to make the institution of the "World Day of the Sick" known to those responsible for the health care apostolate within the Episcopal Conferences, as well as to the national and international organizations involved in the extensive field of health care so that, in accordance with local circumstances, its due observance may be provided for with the participation of the entire People of God; priests, religious and lay faithful.

To this end, it will be the concern of this dicastery to carry out appropriate initiatives of support and leadership so as to make the "World Day of the Sick" a special time of prayer and sharing, of offering one's suffering for the good of the Church and of reminding everyone to see in his sick brother or sister the face of Christ who, by suffering, dying and rising, achieved the salvation of mankind.

4. In the hope that everyone will fully cooperate for the best beginning and development of this "Day," I entrust it to the supernatural efficacy of the motherly mediation of Mary, "*Salus infirmorum*," and the intercession of St. John of God and St. Camillus de Lellis, patrons of places for care and of health care workers. May these saints help in the ever greater spread of the effectiveness of an apostolate of charity which today's world so greatly needs.

These wishes are confirmed by the Apostolic Blessing which I cordially impart to Your Eminence and all those who help you in the beneficial work of serving the sick.

From the Vatican, 13 May 1992.

New Examination of 'Opus Angelorum'

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith

*Doctrinal Congregation reaffirms prior decisions
and adds further norms*

DECREE

In a letter sent to the Holy See and dated 1 December 1977, Cardinal Joseph Hoffner, Archbishop of Cologne and President of the German Episcopal Conference, requested an examination of the association called *Opus Angelorum* (*Engelwerk*) and of its particular doctrines and practices arising from the private revelations alleged to have been received by Mrs. Gabriele Bitterlich.

After finishing this examination, particularly in regard to the written works containing the aforementioned teaching, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in a letter of 24 September 1983, communicated to His Eminence the following decisions already approved by the Sovereign Pontiff in an Audience of 1 July (cf. AAS 76 [1984], pp. 175-176):

1. In promoting devotion to the holy Angels, *Opus Angelorum* must obey the teaching of the Church and of the holy Fathers and doctors.

In particular, it will not disseminate among its members and the faithful that veneration of the Angels which makes use of "names" learned from an alleged private revelation (attributed to

Mrs. Gabriele Bitterlich). The community's use of these same names in any prayer will not be permitted.

2. *Opus Angelorum* will not require of its members nor propose to them the so-called "promise of silence" (*Schweige-Versprechen*), although it is legitimate to maintain the proper discretion regarding the internal affairs of *Opus Angelorum* which befits members of the Church's institutions.

3. *Opus Angelorum* and its members will rigorously observe all liturgical norms, especially those regarding the Eucharist. This particularly applies to the so-called "Communion of reparation."

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith was later able to examine other writings from the same source and was informed that a correct interpretation and implementation of its preceding decisions were not taking place.

An examination of these writings confirmed the judgment on which the preceding decisions had been based, namely, that the angelology peculiar to *Opus Angelorum* and certain practices arising from it were foreign to Sacred Scripture and Tradition, and therefore, cannot serve as a basis for the spirituality and activity of associations approved by the Church.¹

Therefore, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has considered it necessary again to publish these decisions, together with the following complementary norms.

I. The theories arising from the revelations alleged to have been received by Mrs. Gabriele Bitterlich about the world of the Angels, their personal names, their groupings and functions can neither be taught nor made use of in any way, explicitly or implicitly, in the organization and working structure (*Baugerüst*) of *Opus Angelorum*, as well as in worship, prayers, spiritual formation, public and private spirituality, in ministry and the apostolate. The same provision applies to any other institute or association recognized by the Church.

¹Cf. Pope Benedict XIV, *Doctrina de Beatificatione Servorum Dei et de Canonizatione Beatorum*, Bk. IV, Part II, ch. 30, "De Angelis et eorum cultu," Venice, 1777.

The use and dissemination of books or other writings containing the aforementioned theories, either inside or outside the Association, is forbidden.

II. The various forms of consecration to the Angels (*Engelweihe*) practiced in *Opus Angelorum* are prohibited.

III. In addition, the so called remote administration of the sacraments (*Fernspendung*) is prohibited, as well as the insertion of prayers or rituals which directly or indirectly refer to these theories into the Eucharistic Liturgy or the Liturgy of the Hours.

IV. Exorcisms may be practiced only according to the Church's norms and discipline in this regard, with the formulas she has approved.

V. A Delegate with special faculties, appointed by the Holy See, will verify and insist, in consultation with the Bishops, on the application of the norms laid down above. He will see to it that the relations between *Opus Angelorum* and the Order of Canons Regular of the Holy Cross are clarified and regularized.

The Sovereign Pontiff John Paul II, at the Audience granted the undersigned Cardinal Prefect, approved this Decree, adopted in the ordinary meeting of this Congregation, and ordered its publication.

Rome, at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the 6th of June 1992.

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger
Prefect

+Alberto Bovone
Titular Archbishop of Caesarea in Numidia
Secretary

Statement on the Non-Restoration of the Death Penalty

Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines gathered in Plenary Session in Tagaytay on July 23-26, wishes to register its opposition to the restoration of the death penalty in our country for the following reasons:

1. The abolition of the death penalty by the 1936 Constitution was a very big step towards a practical recognition of the dignity of every human being created to the image and likeness of God and, of the value of human life from its conception to its natural end.

This advance was in accordance with the 1971 Resolution of the United Nations which declared, "in order fully to guarantee the right to life, provided for in Article 3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the main objective to be pursued is that of progressively restricting the number of offenses for which the death penalty may be imposed, *with a view to the desirability of abolishing this punishment in all countries*" (emphasis added).

It would indeed be regrettable, if after that step forward embodied in our Constitution, we should now take a backward step without moral necessity.

2. Some people, and many in the mass media are today insistently urging for the restoration of the death penalty. For this

step to be taken, there must be very serious moral justification. We submit that the arguments advanced so far do not justify the restoration of the death penalty.

a. There are those who say that the death penalty is a deterrent to the commission of crimes.

But this deterrent effect on the commission of future crimes by others has nowhere been convincingly established. In fact, the 1989 Amnesty International (AI) report states, "The fact that no clear evidence that the death penalty has a unique deterrent effect has emerged from the many studies made, and the methodological difficulties inherent in all such studies, point to the futility of relying on the deterrence hypothesis as a basis for public policy on the death penalty" (p. 14).

The American Bishops have also pointed out that "there are strong reasons to doubt that many crimes of violence are undertaken in a spirit of rational calculation which would be influenced by a remote threat of death. The small number of death sentences in relation to the number of murders also makes it seem highly unlikely that the threat will be carried out and so undercuts the effectiveness of the deterrent" (*Statement on Capital Punishment*, 1980).

b. Another justifying reason adduced today is retribution or the restoration of the order of justice violated by the criminal's action.

But this retribution need not entail the imposition of the death penalty even in cases of murder. While the killing of a murderer by the State may satisfy vindictive desires, such a satisfaction cannot be the objective of a humane and Christian approach to punishment. From the Christian point of view, Christ's words about the forgiveness of injuries and above all his own example on the Cross call not for vindictive punishment, but rather for more humane and humanizing punitive responses to evil doing. We cannot argue that we should do to the criminal

what he did to his victim. For certainly, as the American Bishops say, we would not justify inflicting torture and the maiming of the limbs of a person who has criminally tortured and maimed another.

c. There are some people who reason out that as in a body it is legitimate to excise a sick organ when such excision is for the good of the whole body, so also it is legitimate to execute a criminal when to do so would redound to the good of the whole of society.

But we reply: a human being is not only a member of society as an organ is a member of a living body. While a human being must live for the good of society, society exists in order to promote the good of the individual human being. A human being has a value in himself/herself and is the goal and purpose of society in a way that a limb or organ is not the goal and purpose of the human body. So, a criminal should be treated only like a sick bodily organ.

3. We positively object also to the restoration of the death penalty for the following reasons:

a. We cannot exclude the possibility of the imposition of the death sentence on innocent human beings. These mistakes have happened before. In our country there have been many instances of reversals of death sentences by the Supreme Court. How are we to be sure that the Supreme Court which does not profess infallibility, has not erred in affirming death sentences by the lower courts? Such errors, when finally executed, are irreversible.

b. The imposition of the death penalty in our country today will have a bias against the poor. We know how inadequate our present judicial procedures are, and how the rich can literally get away with murder, while the poor have few if any to defend them. The ones who will suffer the death penalty will rarely be the rich who have committed crimes, but the poor who have no adequate defense. The preferential option for the poor which the

Second Plenary Council of the Philippines has decided upon finds an application in our opposition to the death penalty. We believe that we should not even think of restoring the death penalty as long as we have not reformed our police and justice systems to the extent at least that there is a real guarantee of truly equal justice for all.

c. The abolition of death penalty is also consistent with our stand for life, which we want to be protected and enhanced from conception to its natural end. Our present Holy Father has articulated this position in the following manner: "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). We believe that human life and the right to it are better defended by abolishing the judicial authorization to impose the death sentence.

In asking for the non-restoration of the death penalty we are articulating the growing conviction regarding the sacredness of human life, and following the example of Pope John Paul II who in an address to the Diplomatic Corps (December 19, 1983), defended "the seamless garment of life" and recommended "clemency, even pardon, for those condemned to death."

d. Finally, we believe that the abolition of the death penalty is most consistent with our faith in Jesus and in the merciful God whose face He has revealed to us. While in the Bible, we find texts that allow legitimate authority to impose the death penalty on a woman who, according to the Mosaic Law, deserved to die, he refused to pass sentence on her, and saved her from certain death (cf. *Jn* 8:1-11).

4. Instead of restoring the death penalty, we propose the following:

a. The relentless pursuit of the direct attack on poverty that President Ramos has been insisting on during these first days of his presidency (cf. his inaugural address and state of the nation speech before Congress), because poverty — especially abject destitution — is a fertile breeding ground for criminality.

b. The reform of our law enforcement and justice systems so that speedy justice will be meted out to all offenders of the law, especially to grave offenders, regardless of economic and social status. Such a reform is a more effective deterrent for crimes than capital punishment would be, and it will help establish an atmosphere of peace and order.

c. The reform of our penal system, so that criminals will indeed be reformed instead of becoming more hardened when they serve out their sentences. Examples exist of such true reform prisons in other countries.

d. A relentless and well-coordinated effort to combat the causes of heinous crimes. Among such causes are the gang culture, drug dependency, and the gambling syndrome.

e. The cleansing of police and military ranks of scalawags in uniform, many of whom have perpetrated crimes or have connived with criminals.

f. The elimination or lessening of the atmosphere of violence propagated by the mass media. The harm done by films that vividly portray violence and even make it an attractive solution to problems is incalculable.

g. The enforcement of the gun ban, so that no persons may carry guns in public places unless they are persons in authority, and (for regular policemen and soldiers) wearing their uniform.

We believe that the fulfillment of these proposals will go a longer way than the restoration of the death penalty towards making

our society a society safe for every human being. The non-restoration of the death penalty will send a very strong message to our violence-torn nation that we want to break the cycle of violence. It is very urgent to see and hear that message today!

(Sgd.) Most Rev. CARMELO D.F. MORELOS, D.D.
President, CBCP

Tagaytay City, 24 July 1992

CBCP Circular No. 1992.59

01 October 1992

Your Eminences/Excellencies:

It is perhaps providential that the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the National Democratic Front (NDF) have agreed in principle to end the 23-year old insurgency through peaceful negotiations. It is equally providential that the military rebels (RAM, SFP, YOU) and the Muslim insurgents (MNLF, MILF, MNLF-R) have responded positively to the government's peace initiatives.

Given all the recent forms of "confidence building" gestures on all sides, it is difficult to ignore the sincerity and earnestness of the government and the rebel forces. We in the Church welcome this new and encouraging climate of openness and thank God who is the real source of all goodness.

We see in these events a confirmation of our repeated calls for peace and reconciliation contained in previous Pastoral Letters, namely,

Exhortation Against Violence, of 7 October 1979,
The Fruit of Justice is Peace, of 26 January 1987,
Solidarity for Peace, of 12 July 1988, and
Seek Peace, Pursue It, of 31 January 1990.

Our statements and recommendations later became propositions during the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (January 20 to February 17, 1991). Then they became conciliar decrees binding on the Philippine Church following the Holy See's approval and our own promulgation last 22 July 1992.

I refer specifically to Articles 23 and 24 under Title V on "The Social Action Apostolate." Echoing our collegial support of the Aquino government's declaration of the "Decade for Peace, 1990-2000," these PCP-II decrees mandate the Church in this country to concretize the 10-point agenda for peace suggested in our Pastoral Letter *Seek Peace, Pursue It*.

The fact that the peace process initiated by the Ramos government is taking place already in the second year of the Decade for Peace, is a clear sign that the longing for peace is intensely increasing and the momentum towards its attainment is accelerating. This is therefore great cause for hope and rejoicing.

The mandate given by the PCP-II decrees now assumes greater importance and urgency when President Fidel V. Ramos issued Executive Order No. 19 which created the National Unification Commission. The president stresses "the need to undertake a comprehensive and participative peace process which will involve all concerned sectors of society in order to generate the collective political will to attain peace with justice." Towards this end the National Unification Commission (NUC) is tasked "to formulate and recommend, after consulting with concerned sectors of society, to the President within ninety (90) days from its formal organization a viable general amnesty program and peace process. . ."

This is the reason why I write to you, Eminences and Excellencies. We have to support and get involved in the peace process. We have to collaborate with the NUC. In designating Bishop Fernando R. Capalla as a commission member President Ramos recognized the invaluable contribution not only of the CBCP but also of the entire Church in the country.

Through your Eminences and Excellencies and your respective clergy, religious and laity, I wish to request the support and involvement of the CBCP commissions and the Association of Major

Religious Superiors of Men and Women. I wish especially to make a similar appeal to the following Church assemblies for inclusion of the peace process in the discussion and planning:

- PCP-II National Planning Committee (2 October 1992);
- NASSA National Convention (6-9 October 1992);
- National Catechetical Convention (12-23 October 1992);
- Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference (26-30 October 1992);
- National Retreat for Priests (9-14 November 1992);
- Asian Conference on Evangelization (16-20 November 1992).

I am sure that the 10-point agenda for peace, its related issues and underlying values are within the scope and competence of these national/regional Church gatherings. I am sure too that the values of peace, reconciliation, unity, dialogue, participation, justice are essential elements of the Church's prayer and reflection during the holy seasons of Advent and Christmas.

As a final reminder allow me to quote our Pastoral Letter ("*Seek Peace, Pursue It*"):

"The task of waging peace is formidable. We see it as a moral struggle. We must not delude ourselves into thinking that the periodic bursts of enthusiasm will conquer evil. The task of waging peace is slow, painful, demanding, and crucifying. It will require a holy endurance and relentless effort. It is not simply the work of one leader or of one government but it is the enterprise of a whole nation."

We place our efforts in the hands of Mary, Our Lady of Peace who brought forth into our world by the power of the Spirit the Prince of Peace, Jesus the Lord.

+CARMELO D.P. MORELOS, D.D.
Bishop of Butuan
President, CBCP

DECADE OF PEACE - SUGGESTED AGENDA*

Because we believe that peace is not simply the absence of war but the fruit of justice and love, as a collegial body of Pastors we wholeheartedly support the government's declaration of a Decade of Peace, 1990-2000. It will be, as declared, a decade of peace and to peace in our land.

For this Decade of Peace, we suggest the following agenda as among those that are essentially required by "the path to peace" (*Lk* 19:42):

1. Transforming values and mentalities into those that are truly oriented to God and to the common good: We need to be a people — and to have leaders — who are *maka-Diyos* and *maka-bayan*. Disvalues such as selfishness and greed must give way to generosity and sharing.

2. Dismantling the structures (systems, e.g., ways of relating and acting in economic and political life supported by laws, policies and entrenched practices) that favor the few and discriminate against the great majority of our people. Monopolies and a system of taxation that lies too heavily on those who have less are such structures that need urgent change.

3. Designing and implementing truly transformative programs of agrarian reform, ecological promotion, and social-economic development geared towards the eradication of gross imbalances and disparities and permeated by a sensitive care for people and for the earth. Today, we still seem, for instance, unable to implement our law against indiscriminate and illegal logging.

4. Peacefully resolving questions of self-determination of various groups in our country within the context of national sovereignty, problems such as posed by the MILF, MNLF, and CPLA.

5. Coming decisively to a moral and political resolution of the complex questions that revolve around the tension of national autonomy and inter-dependence among nations as reflected realities such

*CBCP Pastoral Letter, *Seek Peace, Pursue It*, p. 4.

as various foreign economic interests in our country, our external economic debt, the U.S. military presence, and inadequate transfer of technological knowledge so necessary for our economic growth and self-reliance.

6. Developing a satisfactory and effective educational system that should be critical and liberating and could be more responsive to our country's needs as well as to the needs of the various members of the school community.

7. Freeing once and for all our most disenfranchised sectors, the rural and urban poor, from various forms of bondage, through a sincere practice of the evangelical option for the poor.

8. Effectively checking graft and corruption in private and public life.

9. Conscientiously observing the laws of our country and effectively delivering socio-economic services to our people. Just taxes, for instance, have to be paid faithfully and the government must spend them honestly and wisely for the good of the people.

10. Empowering people in law and in fact in order that decision-making and implementing processes may truly be participatory and oriented to the common good.

(Schismatic) Society of Saint Pius X

Arzobispado de Manila

Circular No. 92-42 28

August 1992

To: All Priests, Religious Superiors (Men and Women), Heads of Schools and Mandated Organizations and The People of God

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

I received information from reliable sources that the SOCIETY OF SAINT PIUS X, the schismatic group founded by the late Archbishop Lefebvre will open a mission house in the Philippines this month (August). The news that I received said that the mission house will be located close to Manila.

I am directing all the Catholic faithful, religious and clergy of Manila keep this schismatic group away from any of our Catholic institutions. No member of the Catholic faithful is allowed to have any association or affiliation with this group.

I trust that you will give this urgent matter your careful attention.

Thank you.

Devotedly in Christ,

(Sgd.)+JAIME L. CARDINAL SIN
Archbishop of Manila

Spanish Christianity: A Filipino Response*

Jaime L. Cardinal Sin

Most Holy Father, Eminent Cardinals, Excellent Archbishops, Bishops, Fathers, Brothers and Sisters:

I have come from the Philippines at the invitation of the President of this Conference in order to be able to assist at the Canonization of St. Ezekiel Moreno, whose mission apostolate included Manila. I am glad to take the kindness offered on this occasion to enjoy, even for a brief two or three days, the fraternal fellowship of my brothers of the Latin American Episcopate.

Yesterday, the Secretary-General, Msgr. Damasceno, asked me to direct a few words for six or seven minutes to this General Assembly, on the occasion of this historic happening which is the Fourth CELAM Conference. Manila as a diocese was carved out of that of Mexico at the same time that Puebla was, in the year 1579. I bear the greetings of a people Spain once encountered amidst epic and indescribable feats of exploration in the solitude of the Pacific. There they were, lacking in baptism, cultural advance and true religion. Spain gathered these people into her hands and signed them with the Sign of the Cross. She wrapped them in the purple robes of her faith which was in those days touching the height of its

*Intervention give by His Eminence Jaime L. Cardinal Sin, Archbishop of Manila, during the Assembly of Latin American Bishops in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, in the presence of our Holy Father, John Paul II, on October 13, 1992.

splendor. This demonstrated to the whole world that the primary motive of Spain's conquests was always to plant the tree of the Cross in every community and at every confine of the world so that, beneath the shadow of the Cross, races and peoples might grow and multiply, adoring the God of history and faith.

Four centuries have gone by, many years, but not so many that the traces which the discovering, colonizing nation impressed in the very marrow of that far-off country and in the heart and soul of its inhabitants could be totally erased. Time, the powers of nature, even the perfidy of men — of those men whom I should qualify as wanting by all accessible means to make dim the glories of Spain — lies and hoaxes heaped up to deny and wrest prestige from the unquestionable glory of the endeavor have succeeded in much destruction. Whole villages have been razed, churches have been laid low, monuments have been destroyed and burnt along with documents which spoke highly and in great detail about the Gospel-spreading work of the Spanish missionary. But something always remains: the Christian faith which Spain brought and implanted there, and which became rooted so deeply in the heart of the Philippines. This lives on and will continue to live on in the shadow of and under the sign of the Cross of Christ. This Cross is the sign of Christians, the banner of faith. It is, moreover, the emblem of evangelization and presides as symbol over our civilization and culture. For over four hundred years it has governed the whole life of the more than seven thousand islands which comprise the Philippine archipelago.

To remember is to compare. Nostalgia is a sentiment purely and profoundly human. Balanced spirits focus life in three great links called present, past and future, three times which can and ought to be linked together if an individual's life or a community's are to remain faithful to the destiny allotted them by God. The three times support and compliment one another. The past fulfills its mission when it becomes the inspiration of the present. The present fulfills its when it becomes the point of departure for future efforts. The future carries out its destiny if its features keep something of the age gone by. A good architect of the present does not destroy and burn down the whole past. Rather he makes use of salvable material to put up a new building. Many have taken ecstatic delight at the thought of Cortes burning his ships. That is all that enlightens them:

consuming fire. But history tells us that Cortes salvaged the iron of the anchors, the usable timber and the war provisions he encountered in the galleons that brought him to Mexico. There are those who wish to build a new nation, but they would like to cast aside from it all material bearing the patina of time.

It is all very well to condemn the fallen, to condemn what serves no more. But it is wrong to condemn the past merely because it is the past. Or the past can take vengeance and turn the present into a novel and unstable arena in which nothing can be built with a view towards eternity. That would be the case when at the least jolt all were to fall down like a cardboard house undone by the least breath of wind. My heart has felt the pain of such a collapse. Hardly was the last foreign domination of my country set up when many schools were founded. On what bases were they established? The basis was a disdain for all things Spanish. In other words it was a disdain for our whole past. From these schools was excluded the first concept of the past, its most fundamental precept. God was expelled from their classrooms. Henceforth matter was given a cultus and its immediate use was worshiped. Philosophy must needs be pure pragmatism and, thus, instead of rendering dignity, homage and honor to man, the honor of the soul and of the soul as pertaining to God, as Pedro Crespo in the *Alcalde de Zalamea* puts it in round truth, instead of their old cultus, the new school wrought the golden calf adored by the Israelites in the desert. To what was this tragic collapse of values due when such values as remained seemed solid because they were all aglow? It was due to the fact that the school lacked that very forcefulness which obliges man to refer his acts to a higher court, to God.

What good fortune, my Brothers, that the Church of the Poor, a hut badly lit and malodorous is crossed by clothesline from which hang tatters of what were once garments. Still, this Church's space is presided over by an image of a makeshift cross arranged with a sheaf of palms from last Palm Sunday. If before the image or cross there burns no votive light, instead many hearts are there to give off their heat.

These are symbols of a definite hope. And this hope, does it not tell you that the People themselves have never ceased being good even if oblivion is their lot, even if disdain marks their treatment?

General Absolution in the New Codex

Excelso Garcia, O.P.

Resolution to Confess in Due Time Duty to Make Individual Confession

25. **Canon 962, § 1.** - "For a member of the Christ's faithful to benefit validly from a sacramental absolution given to a number of people simultaneously, it is required not only that he or she be properly disposed, but be also at the same time personally resolved to confess in due time each of the grave sins which cannot for the moment be thus confessed."

§ 2. - "Christ's faithful are to be instructed about the requirements set out in § 1, as far as possible, even on the occasion of general absolution being received. An exhortation that each person should make an act of contrition is to precede a general absolution, even in the case of danger of death, if there is time."

Since the essence of sacramental confession is in the absolution imparted by the Confessor, all sins committed by the penitents since their last good confession are remitted and forgiven by God through the general absolution, as long as the penitents are properly disposed, i.e., they are truly sorry for those sins not yet confessed nor remitted, and have firmly proposed not to sin again. Moreover, those penitents whose consciences are guilty of mortal sin not yet remitted, must firmly resolve before receiving another general absolution to confess

in due time whatever mortal sins they are conscious of and which they cannot at the moment confess.

The Sacred Apostolic Penitentiary gave the same warning to the priests, so that they could inform the penitents of this duty: "Before imparting general absolution, the priests should inform the Christian faithful, if the circumstances allow it, about the following thing: a) the necessity to make an act of contrition of the sins committed and to be determined not to sin again. It is convenient that the priests require the penitents to show externally their sorrow, if possible, for instance by striking their breasts" (see number 13, IV, a). The *Rite of Penance*, n. 35, b. adds: "for example by bowing their heads, kneeling down or giving some other sign determined by the Episcopal Conference."

The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith formulated this requirement by saying: "With regard to the faithful, they are absolutely required, in order to receive fruitfully the sacramental absolution which will be imparted collectively, to be properly disposed, i.e., to make an act of contrition, to propose not to sin again, to be determined to repair any scandal and possible damages, and resolve to confess in due time all mortal sins, not yet remitted, if any, that cannot be confessed at the moment. The priest should diligently inform the faithful about these dispositions and conditions, since all ~~the faithful must be warned to receive the sacrament validly~~" (see number

faithful, if the circumstances allow it, that: . . . b) they are bound by a serious obligation to confess in their first following sacramental confession all mortal sins, not yet confessed before" (seen number 13, IV, b). Moreover, the Sacred Penitentiary adds: Priests should clearly inform the faithful that they are seriously forbidden to evade the obligation mentioned.

and must not be considered a normal and ordinary form of reconciliation of souls with God and with the Church. It is only an exceptional form of giving the necessary sacramental assistance to persons who are in an exceptional situation. They cannot make their individual confession in the normal way because they are: in danger of death or in a grave necessity, that is, when given the number of penitents, there are not enough confessors available properly to hear the individual confessions at a given time, so that, without fault of their own, the penitents would be deprived of the sacramental grace or of Holy Communion for a lengthy period of time.

It belongs to the diocesan Bishop to judge when the *grave necessity* to impart general absolution exists, considering the criteria of the other members of the Episcopal Conference. Priests cannot, on their own initiative, impart general absolution. They need the license of the diocesan Bishop. If the Bishop cannot be contacted, the priest, being sure of the existence of grave necessity, may give the general absolution, but he must report to the Bishop the grave necessity involved and the fact that he has given general absolution.

It is the duty of the priests before imparting general absolution to exhort the penitents, if there is time, to be properly disposed in order to receive absolution fruitfully: to make an act of contrition and resolve not to sin again. Priests should never omit to warn penitents of the serious obligation of those who are conscious of mortal sin not yet remitted, to confess it, as soon as possible, before receiving another general absolution.

These norms clearly show the great respect the Church has in using the power of keys entrusted to her by the Lord. She is always conscious that to respect God's will is the best way effectively to help sinners on their way to conversion and holiness.

Cases and Inquiries

Ecclesiastical Approval of Books on Faith and Morals

My sister has just arrived from the United States. She brought with her the book I am sending you for examination. The presentation and table of contents seem to be correct enough, but I am not sure about the real truth of the revelations. I have asked our chaplain about it, and he has suggested that I send it to you for a careful examination. May I ask you to go over the content of the book and express your opinion and judgment?

A Religious Sister

We shall try to comply with the request of our Religious Sister, although our opinion and judgment will be restricted to some external aspects only, not to the genuineness and veracity of the book's content. I suppose that the local ecclesiastical Hierarchy will guide the Christian faithful with the official judgment on the matter. Our critique will focus on some details and features of editorial character only.

To start with, we have noticed that the book entitled *True Life in God*, Volume One, sent to us by the consultant Religious Sister, has no ecclesiastical approval, that is the *Nihil Obstat*, nor the *Imprima-*

ture of the competent authority, required by Church law. Canon 823 of the 1983 Codex reads as follows:

“§1. In order to safeguard the integrity and morals, pastors of the Church have the duty and the right to ensure that in writings or in the use of the means of social communication there should be no ill effect on the faith and morals of Christ’s faithful. They also have the duty and the right to demand that where writings of the faithful touch upon matters of faith and morals, these be submitted to their judgment. Moreover, they have the duty and the right to condemn writings which harm true faith or good morals.

§2. For Christ’s faithful entrusted to their care, the duty and the right mentioned in §1 belong to the Bishops, both as individuals and in particular councils or Episcopal Conferences; for the whole people of God, they belong to the supreme authority in the Church.”

At the back of the interior cover of the book in question there is the following *Declaration*: “The Decree of the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, AAS, 58, 1186 (approved by Pope Paul VI on October 14, 1966) states that the *Nihil Obstat* and the *Imprimatur* are no longer required on publications that deal with private revelations, provided they contain nothing contrary to faith and morals. The publisher wishes to manifest unconditional submission to the final and official judgment of the Magisterium of the Church.”

The book is published by *Trinitas*, P.O. Box 475, Independence, Missouri, USA 64051, Phone (816) 254-4489. Copyright 1991, Vasula Ryden. ISBN: 0-9631193-3-8.

With regards to the *Declaration* which appears at the back of the interior cover of the book, we have to make the following observations:

1. The Decree, mentioned by the Editor, was not given by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, but by the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, whose duty it is to evaluate books and other publications concerning faith and morals.

2. For the sake of clarity, we should say that the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith had issued on June 14, 1966 a *Notification* saying that the *Index* of prohibited books was still morally binding in conscience the Christ's faithful in order to avoid those publications that might endanger their faith and morals. This moral obligation is imposed by natural law, notwithstanding the Church's abolition of her past penal laws on the matter (cfr. AAS, vol. 58, 1966, p. 445).

3. The Decree of the Sacred Congregation, mentioned by the Editor of the book *True Life in God*, was given on November 15, 1966, as an answer to the question asking "whether canons 1399 and 2318 (of the 1917 Codex), dealing with books and pamphlets prohibited and with penalties against publishers of books on Holy Scripture without due license respectively, were still in force or not".

4. The answer of the Sacred Congregation was: **NEGATIVE**, i.e., both canons 1399 and 2318 (of the old Codex) were no longer in force, as long as the ecclesiastical law was concerned; but this cannot apply to the *moral law* which always prohibits any possible danger to our faith and good morals.

5. Nothing whatsoever is contained in the Decree of the Sacred Congregation, approved by Pope Paul VI, declaring that the approval of the Church or *Nihil Obstat* and *Imprimatur* for books dealing with faith and morals are no longer needed, as the Editor of the book entitled *True Life in God* says.

6. Obviously the only question posed to the Sacred Congregation and the answer given in the *Decree* were concerning canons 1399 and 2318 of the 1917 Codex: whether these two canons continued in force or not after the *Notification* mentioned in number 2 was given. Nothing else is involved.

7. Canon 1399 of the 1917 Codex read as follows:

"The following are prohibited by the law itself. . . 5. Books and pamphlets that deal with new apparitions, revelations, visions, predictions, miracles, or introduce new religions."



trary to faith and morals." We ask: who is to decide whether is

had already received it in the morning of that day." Moreover, "the faithful, who already have received Holy Communion during the Mass of Christ on Holy Thursday, are allowed to receive it again in the evening Mass."

The new Codex of Canon Law, covering all previous concessions, has changed the previous norm which allowed the faithful to receive Holy Communion only once a day. Canon 917 reads as follows: "Whoever has received Holy Communion, may receive it again on the same day only within a Eucharistic Celebration in which that person participates." The Pontifical Commission for the Interpretation of the Codex has declared that "whoever has received the Holy Communion, may receive it only once again on the same day within a Eucharistic Celebration in which that person participates."

Note that the present law, covering and extending the previous concessions, does not contain any restriction concerning the Eucharistic Celebration in which the second Holy Communion is allowed. It does not state that the participated Mass has to be the Mass of the same day. It simply says: "*A Eucharistic Celebration in which that person participates.*" The concession is to take Holy Communion twice on the same day, as long as the second Holy Communion takes place within the Holy Mass.

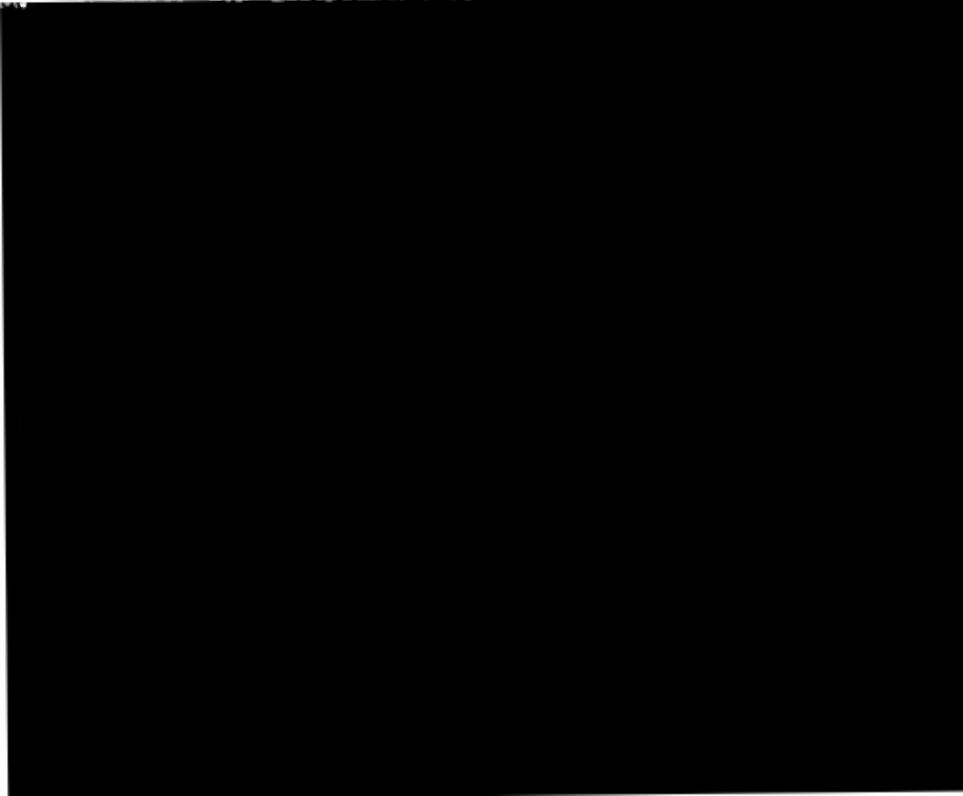
Thus, the faithful may take Holy Communion on Saturday morning during or outside the Mass and again in the evening anticipated Mass. This does not prevent them from taking Holy Communion twice on Sunday if they wish. Note that the second Holy Communion should always take place during the Holy Mass participated by the communicant, not outside the Holy Mass.

EXCELSO GARCIA, O.P.

What's Happening

POPE APPROVES UNIVERSAL CATECHISM

On June 25, 1992, Pope John Paul II gave his official approval to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, which as Cardinal Ratzinger pointed out in his presentation of the definitive text to the Pope, is the result of six years of demanding work. The final text is now

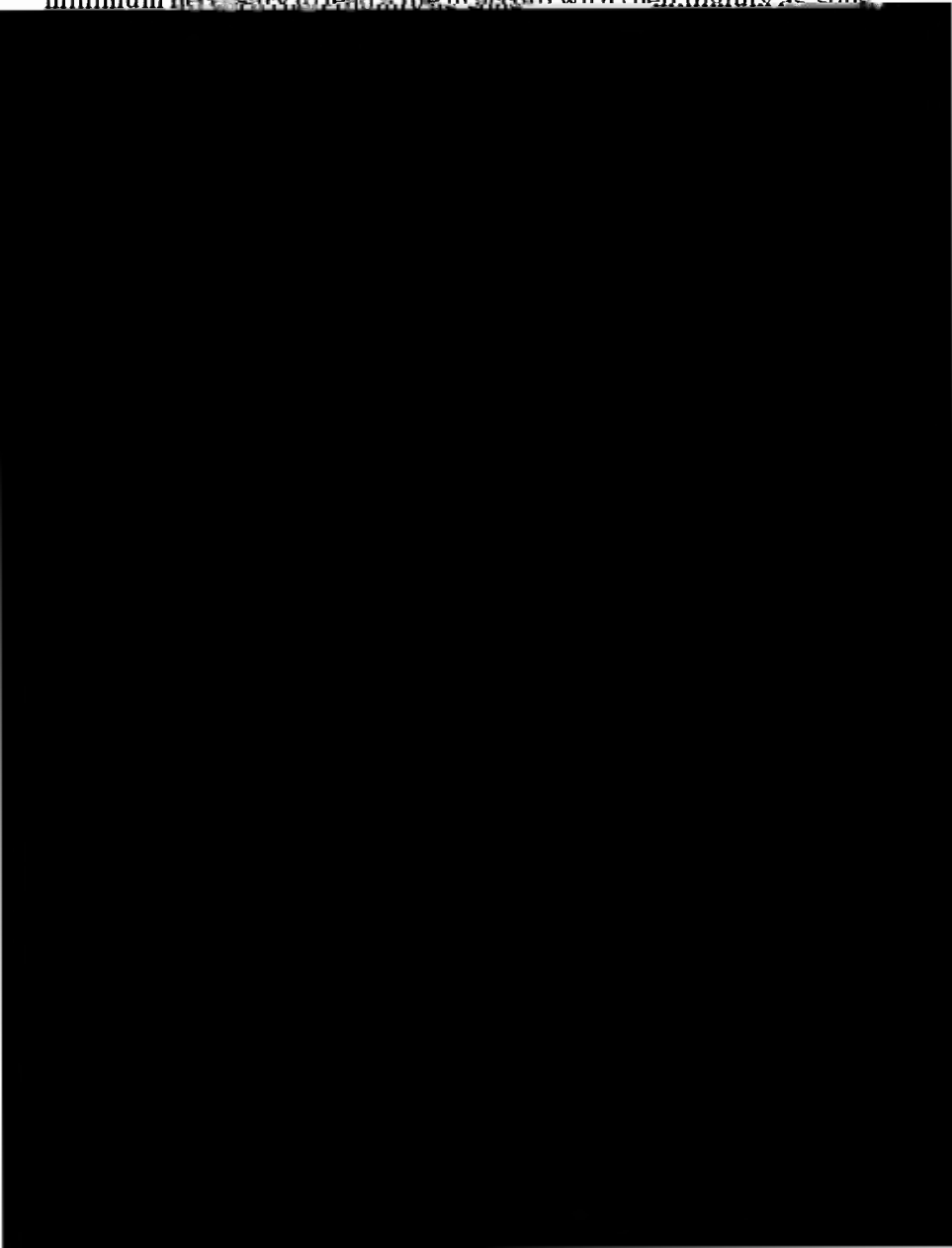




1993 PEACE DAY THEME

For Peace, Reach out to Poor

This year has been marked by various events of a political or societal order that have focused attention across the world on the fact that several million human beings do not have even the very minimum necessary to lead a life in accord with their dignity as sons.



that others may at least live. It is ultimately a society that seeks peace, that lives in peace.

To build such a society involves some basic choices: discovering what poverty really is, reaching out to the poor, embracing in

<i>Mission</i>	<i>Pastoral harvest in Latin America</i>	That the particular Churches of Latin America put into action the missionary orientation flowing from the fifth centenary of evangelization.
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MARCH

<i>General</i>	<i>For those who suffer</i>	That the light of redemption transform personal suffering into a gift of self in union with Christ for the world's salvation.
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<i>Mission</i>	<i>Evangelization in Europe</i>	That Europeans rediscover their Christian roots and local Churches live their duty to spread the Gospel.
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APRIL

<i>General</i>	<i>For non-violence</i>	That people affirm their national identity without recourse to violence.
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<i>Mission</i>	<i>For Chinese Catholics</i>	That Chinese Catholics give an ever more generous testimony of fidelity to Christ, the Church and the nation.
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MAY

<i>General</i>	<i>For youth witness to Christ</i>	That young people, with the strength of the Spirit received in confirmation, courageously witness to Christ in their everyday surroundings.
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<i>Mission</i>	<i>Women's mission in Mary</i>	That all women find in Mary, Mother of the Church, their mission to family, society and Church.
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JUNE

<i>General</i>	<i>For expressive Eucharistic</i>	That celebration of the Eucharistic mystery be better expressed as sacrifice, praise, thanksgiving and reconciliation.
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<i>Mission</i>	<i>Peace in the Middle East</i>	That peace in the Middle East be founded justice and human, social and religious solidarity.
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JULY

*General Collaboration
among Christians*

That all Christians work together
in spreading the Gospel.

Mission For lay missionaries

That native and foreign lay mis-
sionaries be well trained and val-
ued for their activities.

AUGUST

*General For immigrants
and refugees*

That immigrants and refugees be
helped with adequate projects in-
spired by justice and charity.

*Mission For missionary
vocations*

That the witness of priests by faith
and service stimulate missionary
vocations.

SEPTEMBER

*General For social and
responsibility*

That Catholics always be aware of
social and political responsibility.

*Mission Evangelization
for Africa*

That the Special Synod of Bishops
stimulate a new enthusiasm for
teaching the Gospel.

OCTOBER

*General For social
evangelization*

That the new evangelization stress
fidelity to the teaching of the Church
in the social area, too.

Mission Muslim-Christian

That Muslim-Christian dialogue pro-

Festal Homilies for January and February 1993

Roman Carter, O.P.

SOLEMNITY OF THE EPIPHANY January 3, 1993

*Readings: Is 60:1-6
Ep 3:2-6
Mt 2:1-12*

Epiphany is not exactly what many people think it is. Certainly it is the *manifestation* (or true "appearance" in time) of the Eternal Son of God. But its aspectual factors defy limitation, though in delineating them there may be differences, if not conflict, between East and West. For the East (Byzantium and related Churches) Light and Water as symbols, fairly basic in themselves but capable of "higher" explanation, prevail. For the West (Rome and most of us) facts based on data count for more. So what shall we celebrate? It could be the Magi's homage, the Baptism of Jesus or the converting of water into wine. Or it could be the *gifts* the wise men (made "Kings" by tradition) bring and their meaning for Jesus and for us. Most in the West pick the second option, but, as we shall see, to stop short here would be a mistake.

Let us look at the Gospel. And what a Gospel it is! To unravel "fact" from this strange narrative, couched as it is in an aura of

mystery, one needs to be either a dilettante of Near Eastern fantasy or a reader utterly devoid of imagination. What really happened we may never know. What Matthew tells us seems hardly credible and is outside his usual narrative form which is more thematic than chronological. How can a personage such as Herod the Great who died in 4 B.C. have concerned himself with astrological conjectures of Persian or Mesopotamian Magi regarding an obscure babe in Bethlehem? Though this may strain our imagination it does not faze Matthew. He may be trying to tell us something about late Judaism and its relationship with Zoroastrianism. What he is trying to say in detail escapes us. His meaning, however, is clear and central to the message of the Gospel: Jesus is King and is treated as such by knowing foreigners at an early age. More than this is likely to lead us into realms of baseless conjecture.

Let us go back to the first reading. In Chapter 60 of the Isaian scroll the author (probably Trito-Isaiah actually returned from exile and in a ruined Jerusalem) sings a song of dazzling light of a city glorified and visited by foreign pilgrims bearing gifts. The peoples of Midian, Ephah and Sheba are descendants of Abraham perhaps but by no stretch of the imagination are they "Jews." The "light" of

Epiphany, Sheba, the East or the West. When Christ is truly manifest we and all the world share God's new hope!

SOLEMNITY OF THE LORD'S BAPTISM

January 10, 1993

Readings: Is 42:1-4 & 6-7

Ac 10:34-38

Mt 3:13-17

Last Sunday we kept the Epiphany and referred it scripturally to a partial (and infancy-oriented) aspect, and we saw from an Eastern viewpoint, of its true mystery. Today we enter more deeply and in some ways more truly into the mystery of Christ's manifestation as such. This Solemnity is new to Western liturgy as it results from the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. Here water enters explicitly into the symbolism. In the pre-Constantinian Roman usage this was central to the Epiphany celebration as such. As late as the third century, as a sermon of St. Hippolytus makes clear, this was the day when adult baptism was normally conferred. So the adult "showing forth" of Christ was made the liturgical basis for the neophyte's public acceptance of Him as Lord.

The baptism of Jesus seems to have been a recurrent embarrassment to the primitive Christian community who in no way could admit any subservience, however imaginary or even fictional of Jesus to John. Of the synoptic evangelists Mark merely states that Jesus was baptized. Luke refers to Jesus "after his baptism" without recounting the event as such. Matthew alone gives a discursive account filled with ambiguity. Not only does John want to refuse to baptize Jesus, the Lord replies to his disuasive words in enigmatic phraseology. As we must emphasize again and again in this first year of the cycle the language of Matthew is hard to understand. Whatever Jesus is meant to mean by the "fulfilling of righteousness" it is surely not just some sort of ceremonial nod to current custom. The fact that it convinces John means it must have convinced Matthew's original readers. It cannot convince us because we simply do not know what it means! But all of this is preamble. What Matthew really wants us to know is that the heavens opened, the Spirit came down on Jesus and the voice from heaven acknowledged his divine sonship and its grace. This, not the Baptism itself, is the Epiphany. We are not celebrating Jesus immersed in the Jordan.

We are celebrating him risen from the water and divinely proclaimed to be what he is.

It is telling, therefore, that the first reading should be the first Deutero-Isaian Servant Song. The Suffering Servant is the Spirit-endowed Christ, anointed by God as the agent of true justice, enlightener, liberator and deliverer. Christ by his acquiescent passivity, his allowing himself to be baptized, is accredited to fulfill in his person the sum total of the roles of the song.

The second reading shows Peter in Acts attempting to do precisely what the Roman Church was to make customary two centuries later. He will extend baptism to a universal sacramentality as fit for pagans as for Jews because it initiates converts into the whole mystery of Christ from the time when John preached baptism throughout his powerful, godly and anointed ministry on earth. Peter's insight is, indeed, staggering and foretells the worked out Pauline doctrine of the Christian's conformity to Christ.

The Lord's Baptism as the adult manifestation of his incarnate divinity is, then, the source and type of initial grace in us. This grace cannot be had outside the context of a radical passivity, a letting go of the Old Man cursed by sin to endless suffering and death. But once we have let go God works in us as in Christ. He raises us up from the waters of woe. He anoints us with joy and gladness. He acknowledges us to have us to be what we are.

alike. What we have to remind ourselves is that devotion to the Santo Niño is through his image to a Person, not only "grown up" and, indeed, risen from the dead but divine. As devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ it is not only a good thing in itself but also an excellent instrument for spreading the Gospel. For only a truly incarnate Lord could ever have been (and thus ever be imagined as) a little child.

Our readings all dwell on Christ. In the first from Proto-Isaiah, the historic prophet of the eighth and seventh century before Christ, in the midst of his "Book of Emmanuel" (Chapters 7-12) gives what could be a royal accession song on the Ideal King with qualities of his ancestors, David and Solomon, and of Moses. None of the lofty promises or heavenly titles bestowed could really apply to an earth-borne and earthbound creature. Only Christ as God-made-man can fulfill this prophecy.

The Gospel for today gives us the exquisite and far from sentimental teaching of Jesus himself on that spiritual childhood which he has both assumed and proclaimed. This takes us to one of the inner secrets of Matthaeian christology. Jesus never requires of his disciples, or of us, that we should be like him. He does not

touching and uplifting oracles of the whole Old Testament and sets the program, as it were, for Christ's saving work and the whole of Christian life.

The Gospel today is of apostolic vocation and response and the summarized early ministry of Jesus. The two things cannot be separated. The call to repentance is to all mankind. The specific call to be "fishers of men" is at this stage to only four men: Peter, Andrew, James and John. The response is both spontaneous and complete. The work which Jesus does will become the apostolate of his Church after the Resurrection. The four with eight more are to become apprentices of the Lord in the meantime, learning how and by what power the Gospel, the reign, healing and deliverance can be preached. But all this has a setting, the very geographical setting of the first reading. By choosing to live in Capernaum Jesus is seen by Matthew as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. The first part of Israel to be devastated is the first land to hear the Good News. Matthew uses prophecy to proclaim Christ. For Christ is not only prophet but the fulfillment of prophecy. However, his reign is not the territory of Zebulun or Nephtali, not Galilee or any other region of the Holy Land or of the earth. It is rather, the power of God extended in a new way over all creation.

In the second reading Paul recalls the divided Corinthians to unity in Christ. Neither he nor Apollos nor even Cephas (who is, of course, Peter, one of the "first called") is important in himself. For Christ can neither be split up nor parceled out. Christ is important with an importance transcending every sacramental act viewed merely as an external rite, all philosophizing about the whys and wherefores of created things and, certainly, all partisan human attitudes. Christ is important precisely as crucified Lord. St. Paul sees, in other words, the deliverance prophesied by Isaiah and fulfilled in Mathew as both accomplished in Christ and efficaciously verifiable in his own preaching.

We on this Third Sunday of the Year know much interior captivity, perhaps even we sense with dread our own exile and devastation. God has bright promises for us. We are busy in our own "fishing business" large or small. Christ calls us to himself. He wants to heal and free us so that we can, in turn, become agents of healing and freeing. Too much division is found among us. We belong to this group or that. We identify ourselves too much with titles and posts

and even with family names. Christ should be central to us. His death which has freed us should denominate us anew. Let us pray that the bright light of God's liberation may always shine in our hearts despite all the wiles of our enemies. Let us pray that we may hear and heed the Lord whenever and wherever he calls us, that we may both follow and imitate him. Let us pray that united by his death and called by his name alone we may be ready to rise with him in glory. Amen.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

January 31, 1993

Readings: Zeph 2:3-13
1 Co 1:26-31
Mt 5:1-12

All three readings today look at the lowliness we can call spiritual poverty as central to a right and restored relationship between man and God. We could call this the secret of Christianity. We could call it the core of the Gospel. We could go even further and say it is the enigma of Christ and the paradox of faith in him. Certainly this radical humility is (or ought to be) the distinguishing characteristic of Christianity as a world religion. For our weakness is our strength. Our nothingness gives us all both in vision and in grasp. And our dependence on God makes us free as his children.

Zephaniah, from whom we take the first reading, is not a prophet much read or even much mentioned. Yet he is one about whom we know much with fair accuracy. His name (put into Greek as "Sophonias") means literally "Yahweh protects." He lists his father's, his grandfather's, his great grandfather's and his great great grandfather's names together with the time of his prophecy, the reign of Josiah (640-609 B.C.), and implies Jerusalem as its place. The whole import of his prophecy, is that the great and terrible Day of the Lord is at hand. In our reading he calls out to the *anawim* whom Fr. Murphy in the *Jerome* calls "humble folk entirely abandoned to the divine will," so that possible, not sure, shelter may be had through their prayers. These people are to be very Remnant of Israel, sole survivors, as honest as they are needy. But they shall have peace and divine protection.

The Gospel gives us the Beatitudes, among the strongest, most beautiful and hardest to understand of the words put by Matthew on

the lips of Christ. What on earth do they mean? Down through the centuries there have been a multitude of commentaries most divergent in their answers. There can be no doubt that Jesus is "on about" the same sort of "humble remnant" Theology as Zephaniah is. But he is both more explicit and more forceful in delineating it. What he seems to be saying is this: acceptance of negativity is already bliss, but it will be crowned with paradoxical and virtually unexpected gain as well. One analysis sees the Beatitudes as a "projection," as it were, of his own life and *modus vivendi* on earth to his followers so that they can attain his own triumph in heaven. Such an analysis, even if basically true, is deceptively partial, however, and only a step by step commentary on each phrase (filling at least one whole volume) could come near to covering the whole matter.

St. Paul takes the problematic raised by Zephaniah and Matthew and puts it onto a clear-cut sociological level in the second reading. Wisdom, influence, aristocracy are hardly salient characteristics of early Christians in sophisticated Corinth. Folly, the commonplace and things contemptible are more likely. But those who have nothing outdo those who have everything, for the non-possessors are the chosen of God. Christ alone is our wisdom, strength, holiness and freedom. So he is our only boast!

The humble position of "letting go" is badly understood and poorly estimated in our consumer orientated world. And still it remains the only viable Christian position. Unless I let go, God cannot grab me. Unless I die I cannot rise again. Unless I deny myself I cannot affirm Christ. But I can only lay hold of this technique by grace and by realizing it is Christ's own and wanting it as such. It will identify me with the poor. It will give me honesty and hope. It will take me into the realm of the beatitudes and into membership in Christ. Will you join me there?

FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 7, 1993

Readings: Is 58:7-10

1 Co 2:1-5

Mt 5:13-16

Light and knowledge, goodness and truth form the main themes of today's readings. The first is a stirring passage on sharing

and co-responsibility from Deutero-Isaiah. The Gospel from the Sermon on the Mount, is on the self-worth conferred by grace and the second reading contrasts the power of the Spirit with the wavering strength of unaided human thought which the anti-pagan and pharisaically trained Paul lumps together as "philosophy." What is being proposed is not mere self-reliance but a dependence on good which is acknowledged as efficacious, living the life of grace because it works.

If we look more closely at the first reading we discover the author as a kindly spirit writing in discouraging times. He is saying, in effect, "do what you can, then lift up your eyes before evaluating the effects of your attempts." To win out on the last day we must do good now. We must be concerned for the hungry, the homeless and the ill-clad. For all men and women are our "relatives" before God. Because we are now united in lowliness and need we can all be raised up to glory and plenty. If we are true to God, God will be true to us, revealing his very Presence. But justice involves curtailing violent, backbiting words and every form of greed. Only with a sense of justice will we fast enough to feed the hungry, not from our surplus but from our diminished rations. Only when oppression is willingly relieved will light shine forth and noon-tide splendor be revealed.

The Sermon on the Mount consists of three chapters (the fifth, sixth and seventh) of Matthew's Gospel. It is a compendium of basic Christian norms and its basis is the life and lifestyle of Jesus Himself. It is neither a New Law nor a manual of optional suggestions. Rather, it is an in-depth instruction meant to reorientate the values of its already believing readers. One commentator has called it a series of directions to love. It not only introduces Jesus in his words and deeds, it exemplifies him. Thus, the things our Lord says about his followers in today's Gospel are first and foremost true about himself. For only by God's grace as mediated by Christ and gained in the Spirit can we be "salt" or "light" or "city" or even do any "good works." What differentiates us from Christ is that our salt can become adulterated, weakened and false. His cannot. Our light can be hidden as can our citadel. His cannot. We can put our lamp under a basket. His will always be on the lampstand. Our light through sin can become dim or go out. His burns brightly forever. But wherever and however we represent him, our hearts will be united with his, and the Father will be praised.

In writing to the Corinthians St. Paul wants to preserve a balance between personal modesty and apostolic zeal. He does this by referring all his accomplishments and even his means to such ends to Christ. No power of his own (or of any other creature) could do what he has done in preaching and conversion. What God has guaranteed is that Christ who died has risen. When we enter into and identify ourselves with his death we have the gnosis or knowledge that counts. But only the power of the Spirit can give us the fortitude to express with our lips what we believe in our hearts. Neither eloquence nor cleverness can do the trick. For the Gospel has its own realism in the realm of grace which both transcends and overwhelms the truth however real or exact, of any thought up system of men. Faith depends on power, not on reason. Grace builds on nature by uplifting it and going far beyond it.

Is our life really one of self-giving service to those in all kinds of needs? Do we "flavor" and enlighten our environment? What do we believe and how do we state it? Is Christ the central reality of our thoughts, words and deeds? If so, praise goes up not just from and through us but for us to the Father on high. If not, let us pray for justice, seasoning, light, strength and the very power of God to enter our lives and make us what he wants us to be.

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time February 14, 1993

*Readings: Sir 15:16-21
1 Co 2:6-10
Mt 5:17-37*

The three readings at today's Mass touch the very core of authentic religiosity. But all three involve both ideas and terms so intimately and uniquely Jewish that they are hard for us as twentieth century Christians in the Philippines to either analyze or contextualize. What is involved in all three is a sense of the world as compenetrated by God and known in wisdom. But this God and his wisdom are the preserve, as it were, of an elect which is not elite. God is concerned. His wisdom is practical. His elect are certainly chosen by him but not by any definite external standard. Their call is not only implicit. It is implicitly universal. This is, in itself, the world-view of certain sectors of late Judaism. It comes to us as scripture because writers from those sectors before or after Christ

were either appealing to early Christianity or composed a major force in its ranks. Be that as it may they continue to speak in their own terms which we can only haltingly decipher.

The first reading seems easy enough and, read superficially, it might even appeal to a Mormon. It seems to say in effect that anyone can be good who wants to and all will be judged by God according to their acts. Evil has neither rights nor necessity. So it sounds, but that is not exactly what it says. Dear old Ecclesiasticus, Ben Sira, hellenized to Sirach, has been much used since the second century before Christ by Jews and Christians to make him say what they want him to say. What he really says is anti-fatalistic. Sin is not what "befalls" us or even what God permits. Evil comes into our lives because we will it. There is a context of relationship with God that makes for good choices, however. We have wisdom if we know God's commands. And how can we know them unless we are covenanted to him? Unless I know that God sees everything, what keeps my choices from being willy-nilly? If the eyes of God are upon each of us and his commands govern us we shall, of course, opt in his favor. But the option is in the context of a community governed and directed by divine revelation, an assembly of the wise to which we must adhere and belong.

The Gospel in its longer form (and this is preferable since we can never get enough of the Word of God) moves step by step from generalities regarding the law of 613 Commands in the Pentateuch, its three thousand-fold oral interpretation by scribes of the Pharisees' school and its usual interpretation to a sort of critique in wisdom by Jesus as rabbi and founder of a new school. His morality is as startling as it is difficult but still unashamedly Jewish. For the whole thrust of Jesus' argument is that Law must be both interpreted and judged by Law, one part by another in accordance with rules he imposes regarding relative importance. And his rules are not haphazard. In the subtle and complex problematic of re-interpreting the Law Jesus' norm stressed by Matthew is that of "fulfillment" which means "bringing to perfection" or "leading to finality." Against the rather static views of the Pharisees Jesus restores to the Law its internal dynamism. But he hardly does so at the expense of rigor. Rather, his teaching is harder than theirs. But his teaching points to fulfillment both in himself and in the New Law of love he will give. His virtue, like his authority, exceeds theirs.

Six points are taken up in Chapter 5, four of which are in today's Gospel: murder, adultery, divorce and oaths. As to the first anger is equated with murder because mutual dislike among persons is based not on exterior happenings but on inner processes. Adultery is equated with the lustful look for it proceeds from an impulse rooted in a perverse heart. Divorce is equated with adultery because it leads to disorder. Oath taking is forbidden because it both implies and, if followed, leads to perjury. Honest men merely state their case. The whole tenor of the discussion is rabbinical. Jesus is interpreting, not legislating. But his interpretation will form the basis of Christian outlook when he proclaims and we accept his New Law of love.

One would expect St. Paul to be more explicitly Christian. But, though for him Jesus is, indeed, Lord of Glory, the wisdom taught is old. It is eternal. It is that revealed in all the "wisdom literature" of the Old Testament. It is consonant with Sirach and Matthew but has a prophetic depth more redolent of Isaiah. Here is pneumatic teaching that goes to the depth of man's only possible relationship with God that can endure, that guided by the Holy Spirit. What "baptizes" Paul's ideas and Sirach's and Matthew's is that we can see better what they mean with lasting consequence with eyes of faith than with blinkers of an antique (and antiquated) mind-set. And in the realm of grace, wherein alone these sayings can be lived out, they make eminently practical sense. For there we make choices truly free. There we are ruled by consequential commands and not by quibbling. There we have a wisdom taught in mysteries and are led by the Spirit to the deep things of God.

SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

February 21, 1993

Readings: Lv 19:1-18
 1 Co 3:16-23
 Mt 5:38-48

Christian love is based on honesty. It makes itself felt in unexpected tolerance. It evaluates persons and things according to their potential or real relationship with God and not on basis of "wise" prejudice or passing standards. For the central truth of all revelation is that we can become God-like because God has come to us through his Word made man. This is wisdom which when seen in

isolated facets looks like folly. The wisdom of this world is folly to God. But this wisdom is Christ himself. The very wisdom of God.

A look at the passage from Leviticus 19 which ends with the injunction quoted by Jesus to summarize the Law has to do with openness and honesty in dealing with our neighbor. This openness and honesty is not limited to good times. Its real value, rather, comes when things go wrong; when by nature we would be inclined not to speak, when we might be tempted to vengeance, when a grudge seems just because our feelings are hurt. Here is where our love is tested. We must love in the midst of adversity because God does. He says, "I am the Lord" and he means that if we are loyal vassals we must act as he does.

Nothing could bring this doctrine found in seminal form in Leviticus to greater growth and fruition than Jesus' own teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The other cheek, the added garment, the second mile, the happy gift or loan are signs of Godlikeness made real. The perfection of God is sun and rain for all. Our perfection is loving all, including the loveless and the unlovable.

This we can do if we are what St. Paul calls "temples of God" because the Spirit lives in us. We learn wisdom when we get down from the high horse of our cleverness and start loving the poor. We learn wisdom when we admit folly, when good deeds convince us more than tricky words. Then everything and everybody fall into place. All become our "servants" because we are so like Christ that we are God-like, indeed.

When and where is so great a love to be found? Is it reserved to the heart of the Trinity or exclusive to the saints in glory? So great a love is found whenever and wherever our hearts are pierced by the light of Christ. It is found whenever and wherever we are willing to love with his love, as he loved and for love of him. And whenever and wherever it is found God raises us up. May he continue to do so till we are his forever.

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

February 28, 1993

Readings: Gn 2:7 - 3:7
Rm 5:12-19
Mt 4:1-11

Last Wednesday on which we were marked with ashes began the holy season of Lent. The First Sunday in this first year of the cycle presents us with readings touching themes far from dear to contemporary men and women. Because sin and temptation, the fall and its consequence, the Law and its breaking and, yes, the very problem of evil itself are all negative aspects of religious reality, people today would prefer not to consider them. However, if the saving work of Christ, if repentance and forgiveness, if conversion and Baptism, if Resurrection itself are to have the central place they should in Christian life, this can only be accomplished if negativity and its roles are well examined before their antidotes are applied. "Positive thinking" is all very well. But it must never curb a sober analysis of the facts of (and reasons for) human failure.

Our first reading tells how in Eden temptation was wrongly dealt with. The Gospel tells how in the desert Christ rightly dealt with it. The second reading gives a theology of sin and death from Adam to Moses, from Moses to Christ. There is an interdependence of the thought involved. This is one reason more why all three readings should be exposed and expounded in the liturgy of the word. All sin involves temptation. Temptation can only be resisted by relating one's self to God. The grace of this relationship is mediated by Christ who wielded it well before he passed it on to us as free gift.

Genesis 2 gives the second or Yahwist account of human creation. The author involved is given to colorful writing and anthropomorphic views of God. He takes all creation and reduces it purposely to a delimited time-space area which he calls Eden, paradise in the East. There serpents can speak and humanity has but two members, sexually differentiated and oriented towards the delights of the palate. The scope of the narrative is limited for purpose of illustration and to cause the reader to gasp a bit. This is good story telling. We end up with two people clothed in fig leaves, having started with the very breath of God! In between comes a decision. The wily serpent tempts the woman, and she falls. Her husband falls more easily through a blandished gift. As soon as knowing good and evil follows the ingestion of pulp, shame appears. Shame always seeks a cover-up. Fig leaves seem to do until God intervenes and orders otherwise.

Jesus is hungry after his prolonged fast. He cannot remain in the wilderness forever. Why not garner some miraculous fast-food

before returning to the haunts of men? For one good reason, miracles are not for their worker's convenience or comfort but are signs of something greater. So is bread. God's word (and, thus, his will) is more important. Well, what about some aerobatics if you are feeling giddy? Again, no games are allowed. Angelic protection is to protect us not to make us put God to the test. Experiments are not allowed in sublime areas! Finally, what about instant messianism even if it involves a little devil worship? Isn't the end one that far outweighs the means? Jesus replies: "Get out, Enemy!" for worship is reserved to God.

St. Paul sees things in clear-cut terms of sin, Law and grace. Sin causes death. Law causes even more sin. The medicine here is worse than the disease. But grace overcomes sin, the penalties of the law and even death itself. For grace is as transforming as it is amazing. Note that all these terms of reference involve real human beings who act and act decisively. Adam decides to sin, Moses knowingly proclaims the Law. Christ is both agent and cause of grace. All three men do what they do relative to God. Adam disobeys him. Moses obeys him so that differentiation between his will and what opposes it can be openly delineated. Christ obeys him to death and through his "good act" brings life and justification to all. Man was made a sinner by Adam. He is shown his sin by Moses. He is redeemed from sin and its lethal consequences by Christ.

What is Lent for us? It should be a time of curbing our proneness to sin by resisting temptation. Through fasting we reject the proffered fruit of Eden and bread in the wildness. It should be a time of centering on God and trusting him alone. Through almsgiving we rid ourselves of the temptation to "fly high" in earthly delights as we adorn ourselves with newer and more useless fig-leaf garments. It should be a time of increase in and appreciation of grace as through prayer we become closer to God and frame anew our minds according to his pattern. Best of all it should be a time when we take negativity by the horns, overcome it and prepare for Easter triumph.

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Natural family planning summit sponsored by Council for Family

From 9-11 December the Pontifical Council for the Family is holding a summit meeting of world experts on the natural methods of birth regulation. The meeting will be the first of its kind sponsored by the Pontifical Council, and for this reason it is a historic moment in the development of natural methods. The Church is taking this initiative to study further the valid scientific and ethical alternatives to contraception and other threats to life.

Included among the 50 participants invited from every continent are the great pioneers of various methods: Dr Josef Roetzer, Drs John and Lyn Billings, Dr Thomas Hilgers and Dr Anna Cappella, together with the leaders of different international movements promoting these methods, such as Dr Claude Lanctot. Also attending the meeting are experts from the special programme on human reproduction of the World Health Organization and Georgetown University, who conduct research on natural methods. Noted moralists, theologians and philosophers will assist the scientists and leaders in the discussion.

The purpose of the meeting is dialogue and the high-level exchange of scientific, theological, philosophical and anthropological information for more thorough knowledge and to help solve common problems and promote closer cooperation.

The Pontifical Council for the Family will prepare a special document with objective information as presented during the experts' discussion. This document will be published afterwards to promote the natural methods and to give more up-to-date information to Episcopal Conferences, Bishops, universities and institutes, and to the various family and pro-life movements.

A press conference is planned for 10 December.