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## **editorial**

*As mentioned in the latest issue of Boletín, we are publishing the full text of the "Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators." It's an appropriate follow-up of our reflection on the Priesthood in the previous issues of Boletín. We cannot over-emphasize the importance of formation in the priestly life, and although formation is the primary responsibility of every candidate, formators certainly play a decisive part in that formation.*

*Neither could we discount the role of the family in fostering and nourishing vocations. In fact, the family is the backbone of every society, including the Church. It is timely that 1994 has been declared the International Year of the Family both by the United Nations and the Holy Father.*

*In this issue, we are also publishing the complete text of the Holy Father's "Letter to the Families." In no time is the concern for the family more critical than in ours. Ramon J. Forlan, in his column in The Philippine Star of April 8, 1994, basing on the McCann-Erickson Philippines findings, reported that "one third of our young people are living with a single parent. This has been brought about by increasing marital split-ups but in addition to the usual domestic difficulties, the impact of the overseas migrant worker is taking a toll on family life.... With the absence of parents, the youth turn to their peers, not just for friendship but also for security and guidance..."*

*This does not give us a healthy picture, certainly, and we hope that the declaration of the Family Year will lead us all to give the family the concern it needs and deserves.*

FR. HONORATO CASTIGADOR, O.P.  
Editor

## Letter to Families

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*John Paul II*

### LETTER FOR THE 1994 YEAR OF THE FAMILY

Dear Families!

1. The celebration of the Year of the Family gives me a welcome opportunity to knock at the door of your home, eager to greet you with deep affection and to spend time with you. I do so by this Letter, taking as my point of departure the words of the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, published in the first days of my ministry as the Successor of Peter. There I wrote that *man is the way of the Church*.<sup>1</sup>

With these words I wanted first of all to evoke the many paths along which man walks, and at the same time to emphasize how deeply the Church desires to stand at his side as he follows the paths of his earthly life. The Church shares in the joys and hopes, the sorrows and anxieties<sup>2</sup> of people's daily pilgrimage, firmly convinced that it was Christ himself who set her on all these paths. Christ entrusted man to the Church; he entrusted man to her as the "way" of her mission and her ministry.

#### *The family — way of the Church*

2. Among these many paths, *the family is the first and the most important*. It is a path common to all, yet one which is particular, unique and unrepeatable, just as every individual is unrepeatable; it

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (4 March 1979), 14: AAS 71 (1979), 284-285.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 1.

is a path from which man cannot withdraw. Indeed, a person normally comes into the world within a family, and can be said to owe to the family the very fact of his existing as an individual. When he has no family, the person coming into the world develops an anguished sense of pain and loss, one which will subsequently burden his whole life. The Church draws near with loving concern to all who experience situations such as these, for she knows well the fundamental role which the family is called upon to play. Furthermore, she knows that *a person goes forth from the family in order to realize in a new family unit his particular vocation in life*. Even if someone chooses to remain single, the family continues to be, as it were, his existential horizon, that fundamental community in which the whole network of social relations is grounded, from the closest and most immediate to the most distant. Do we not often speak of the "human family" when referring to all the people living in the world?

The family has its origin in that same love with which the Creator embraces the created world, as was already expressed "in the beginning," in the *Book of Genesis* (1:1). In the Gospel Jesus offers a supreme confirmation: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son" (Jn 3:16). The *only-begotten Son*, of one substance with the Father, "*God from God and Light from Light*," *entered into human history through the family*: "For by his incarnation the Son of God united himself in a certain way with every man. He laboured with human hands... and loved with a human heart. Born of Mary the Virgin, he truly became one of us and, except for sin, was like us in every respect."<sup>3</sup> If in fact Christ "fully discloses man to himself,"<sup>4</sup> he does so beginning with the family in which he chose to be born and to grow up. We know that the Redeemer spent most of his life in the obscurity of Nazareth, "obedient" (Lk 2:51) as the "Son of Man" to Mary his Mother, and to Joseph the carpenter. Is this filial "obedience" of Christ not already the first expression of that obedience to the Father "unto death" (Phil 2:8), whereby he redeemed the world?

*The divine mystery of the Incarnation of the Word thus has an intimate connection with the human family. Not only with one family, that of Nazareth, but in some way with every family, analo-*

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., n. 22.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



gously to what the Second Vatican Council says about the Son of God, who in the Incarnation "united himself in some sense with every man."<sup>5</sup> Following Christ who "came" into the world "to serve" (Mt 20:28), the Church considers serving the family to be one of her essential duties. In this sense both man and the family constitute "the way of the Church."

### *The Year of the Family*

3. For these very reasons *the Church joyfully welcomes the decision* of the United Nations Organization *to declare 1994 the International Year of the Family*. This initiative makes it clear how fundamental the question of the family is for the member States of the United Nations. If the Church wishes to take part in this initiative, it is because she herself has been sent by Christ to "all nations" (Mt 28:19). Moreover, this is not the first time the Church has made her own an international initiative of the United Nations. We need but recall, for example, the International Year of Youth in 1985. In this way also the Church makes herself present in the world, fulfilling a desire which was dear to Pope John XXIII, and which inspired the Second Vatican Council's Constitution *Gaudium et spes*.

On the Feast of the Holy Family in 1993 the whole ecclesial community began the "Year of the Family" as one of the important steps along the path of preparation for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, which will mark the end of the second and the beginning of the third millennium of the Birth of Jesus Christ. This Year ought to direct our thoughts and our hearts towards Nazareth, where it was officially inaugurated this past 26 December at a Solemn Eucharistic liturgy presided over by the Papal Legate.

Throughout this Year it is important to discover anew the many *signs of the Church's love and concern for the family*, a love and concern expressed from the very beginning of Christianity, when the meaningful term "*domestic church*" was applied to the family. In our own times we have often returned to the phrase "domestic church," which the Council adopted<sup>6</sup> and the sense of which we hope will

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, n. 11.

always remain alive in people's minds. This desire is not lessened by an awareness of the changed conditions of families in today's world. Precisely because of this, there is a continuing relevance to the title chosen by the Council in the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* in order to indicate what the Church should be doing in the present situation: "*Promoting the dignity of marriage and the family.*" Another important reference point after the Council is the 1981 Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*. This text takes into account a vast and complex experience with regard to the family, which among different peoples and countries always and everywhere continues to be the "way of the Church." In a certain sense it becomes all the more so precisely in those places where the family is suffering from internal crises or is exposed to adverse cultural, social and economic influences which threaten its inner unity and strength, and even stand in the way of its very formation.

## **Prayer**

4. In this Letter I wish to speak not to families "in the abstract" but to *every particular family in every part of the world*, wherever it is located and whatever the diversity and complexity of its culture and history. The love with which God "loved the world" (Jn 3:16), the love with which Christ loved each and every one "to the end" (Jn 13:1), makes it possible to address this message to each family, as a living "cell" of the great and universal "family" of mankind. The Father, Creator of the Universe, and the Word Incarnate, the Redeemer of humanity, are the source of this universal openness to all people as brothers and sisters, and they impel us to *embrace them in the prayer* which begins with the tender words: "*Our Father.*"

Prayer makes the Son of God present among us: "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (Mt 18:20). This *Letter to Families* wishes in the first place to be a prayer to Christ to remain in every human family; an invitation to him, in and through the small family of parents and children, to dwell in the great family of nations, so that together with him all of us can truly say: "Our Father!" Prayer must become the dominant element of the Year of the

<sup>7</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, Part 11, Chap. 1.

**Family in the Church: prayer by the family, prayer for the family, and prayer with the family.**

It is significant that precisely *in and through prayer, man comes to discover in a very simple and yet profound way his own unique subjectivity: in prayer the human "I" more easily perceives the depth of what it means to be a person. This is also true of the family*, which is not only the basic "cell" of society but also possesses a particular subjectivity of its own. This subjectivity finds its first and fundamental confirmation, and is strengthened, precisely when the members of the family meet in the common invocation: "Our Father." Prayer increases the strength and spiritual unity of the family, helping the family to partake of God's own "strength." In the solemn nuptial blessing during the Rite of Marriage, the celebrant calls upon the Lord in these words: "Pour out upon them [the newlyweds] the grace of the Holy Spirit so that by your love poured into their hearts they will remain faithful in the marriage covenant."<sup>8</sup> This "visitation" of the Holy Spirit gives rise to the inner strength of families, as well as the power capable of uniting them in love and truth.

### ***Love and concern for all families***

5. May the Year of the Family become a harmonious and universal prayer on the part of all "domestic churches" and of the whole People of God! May this prayer also reach families in difficulty or danger, lacking confidence or experiencing division, or in situations which *Familiaris consortio* describes as "irregular."<sup>9</sup> *May all families be able to feel the loving and caring embrace of their brothers and sisters!*

During the Year of the Family, prayer should first of all be an encouraging witness on the part of those families who live out their human and Christian vocation in the communion of the home. How many of them there are in every nation, diocese and parish! With reason it can be said that these families make up "the norm," even admitting the existence of more than a few "irregular situations."

<sup>8</sup> *Rituale Romanum, Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, n. 74, editio typica altera, 1991, p. 26.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22 November 1981), 79-84: AAS 74 (1982), 180-186.

And experience shows what an important role is played by a family living in accordance with the moral norm, so that the individual born and raised in it will be able to set out without hesitation on the road of the good, which *is always written in his heart*. Unfortunately various programmes backed by very powerful resources now always seem to aim at the breakdown of the family. At times it appears that concerted efforts are being made to present as “normal” and attractive, and even to glamourize, situations which are in fact “irregular.” Indeed, they contradict “the truth and love” which should inspire and guide relationships between men and women, thus causing tensions and divisions in families, with grave consequences particularly for children. The moral conscience becomes darkened; what is true, good and beautiful is deformed; and freedom is replaced by what is actually enslavement. In view of all this, how relevant and thought-provoking are the words of the Apostle Paul about the freedom for which Christ has set us free, and the slavery which is caused by sin (cf. Gal 5:1)!

It is apparent then how timely and even necessary a Year of the Family is for the Church; how indispensable is *the witness of all families* who live their vocation day by day; how urgent it is *for families to pray* and for that prayer to increase and to spread throughout the world, expressing thanksgiving for love in truth, for “the outpouring of the grace of the Holy Spirit,”<sup>10</sup> for the presence among parents and children of Christ the Redeemer and Bridegroom, who “loved us to the end” (cf. Jn 13:1). Let us be deeply convinced that this *love is the greatest of all* (cf. I Cor 13:13), and let us believe that it is really capable of triumphing over everything that is not love.

During this year may the prayer of the Church, the prayer of families as “domestic churches,” constantly rise up! May it make itself heard first by God and then also by people everywhere, so that they will not succumb to doubt, and all who are wavering because of human weakness will not yield to the tempting glamour of merely apparent goods, like those held out in every temptation.

At Cana in Galilee, where Jesus was invited to a marriage banquet, his Mother, also present, said to the servants: “Do whatever he tells you” (Jn 2:5). Now that we have begun our celebration of the

<sup>10</sup> Cf. *Rituale Romanum, Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, n. 74, ed. cit., p. 26.

Year of the Family, Mary says the same words to us. What Christ tells us, in this particular moment of history, constitutes a forceful call to a great prayer with families and for families. The Virgin Mother invites us to unite our selves through this prayer to the sentiments of her Son, who loves each and every family. He expressed this love at the very beginning of his mission as Redeemer, with his sanctifying presence at Cana in Galilee, a presence which still continues. Let us pray for families throughout the world. Let us pray, through Christ, with him and in him, to the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (Eph 3:15).

I

## THE CIVILIZATION OF LOVE

### *"Male and female he created them"*

6. The universe, immense and diverse as it is, the world of all living beings, *is inscribed in God's fatherhood, which is its source* (cf. Eph 3:14-16). This can be said, of course, on the basis of an analogy, thanks to which we can discern, at the very beginning of the Book of Genesis, the reality of fatherhood and motherhood and consequently of the human family. The interpretative key enabling this discernment is provided by the principle of the "image" and "likeness" of God highlighted by the scriptural text (Gen 1:26). God creates by the power of his word: "Let there be ... !" (e.g., Gen 1:3). Significantly, in the creation of man this word of God is followed by these other words: "*Let us make man* in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). Before creating man, the Creator withdraws as it were into himself, in order to seek the pattern and inspiration in the mystery of his Being, which is already here disclosed as the divine "We." From this mystery the human being comes forth by an act of creation: "*God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them*" (Gen 1:27).

God speaks to these newly-created beings and he blesses them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:28). The Book of Genesis employs the same expressions used earlier for the creation of other living beings: "multiply." But it is clear that these expressions are being used in an analogous sense. Is there not present

here the analogy of begetting and of fatherhood and motherhood, which should be understood in the light of the overall context? No living being on earth except man was created "in the image and likeness of God." Human fatherhood and motherhood, while remaining *biologically similar* to that of other living beings in nature, contain in an essential and unique way a "*likeness*" to God which is the basis of the family as a community of human life, as a community of persons united in love (*communio personarum*).

In the light of the New Testament it is possible to discern how *the primordial model of the family is to be sought in God himself*, in the Trinitarian mystery of his life. The divine "We" is the eternal pattern of the human especially of that "we" formed by the man and the woman created in the divine image and likeness. The words of the Book of Genesis contain that truth about man which is confirmed by the very experience of humanity. Man is created "from the very beginning" as male and female: the life of all humanity whether of small communities or of society as a whole - is marked by this primordial duality. From it there derive the "masculinity" and the "femininity" of individuals, just as from it every community draws its own unique richness in the mutual fulfillment of persons. This is what seems to be meant by the words of the Book of Genesis: "Male and female he created them" (Gen 1:27). Here too we find the first statement of the equal dignity of man and woman: both in equal measure, are persons. Their constitution, with the specific dignity which derives from it, defines "from the beginning" the qualities of the common good of humanity, in every dimension and circumstance of life. To this common good both man and woman make their specific contribution. Hence one can discover, at the very origins of human society, the qualities of communion and of complementarity.

### ***The marital covenant***

7. The family has always been considered as the first and basic expression of man's *social nature*. Even today this way of looking at things remains unchanged. Nowadays, however, emphasis tends to be laid on how much the family, as the smallest and most basic human community, owes to the personal contribution of a man and a woman. The family is in fact a community of persons whose proper way of existing and living together is communion: *communio personarum*.

Here too, while always acknowledging the absolute transcendence of the Creator with regard to his creatures, we can see the family's ultimate relationship to the divine "We." *Only persons are capable of living "in communion."* The family originates in a marital communion described by the Second Vatican Council as a "covenant," *in which man and woman "give themselves to each other and accept each other."*<sup>11</sup>

The Book of Genesis helps us to see this truth when it states, in reference to the establishment of the family through marriage, that "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). In the Gospel, Christ, disputing with the Pharisees, quotes these same words and then adds: "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt 19:6). In this way, he reveals anew the binding content of a fact which exists "from the beginning" (Mt 19:8) and which always preserves this content. If the Master confirms it "now," he does so in order to make clear and unmistakable to all, at the dawn of the New Covenant, the *indissoluble character* of marriage as the *basis of the common good of the family*.

When, in union with the Apostle, we bow our knees before the Father from whom all fatherhood and motherhood is named (cf. Eph 3:14-15), we come to realize that parenthood is the event whereby the family, already constituted by the conjugal covenant of marriage, is brought about "in the full and specific sense."<sup>12</sup> Motherhood necessarily implies fatherhood, *and in turn, fatherhood necessarily implies motherhood*. This is the result of the duality bestowed by the Creator upon human beings "from the beginning."

I have spoken of two closely related yet not identical concepts: the concept of "communion" and that of "community." "*Communion*" has to do with the personal relationship between the "I" and the "thou." "*Community*" on the other hand transcends this framework and moves towards a "society," a "we." The family, as a community of persons, is thus the first human "society." It arises whenever there

<sup>11</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22 November 1981), 69: AAS 74 (1982), 165.

comes into being the conjugal covenant of marriage, which opens the spouses to a lasting communion of love and of life, and it is brought to completion in a full and specific way with the procreation of children: the "communion" of the spouses gives rise to the "community" of the family. The "community" of the family is completely pervaded by the very essence of "communion." On the human level, can there be any other "communion" comparable to that *between a mother and a child* whom she has carried in her womb and then brought to birth?

In the family thus constituted there appears a new unity, in which the relationship "of communion" between the parents attains complete fulfillment. Experience teaches that this fulfillment represents both a task and a challenge. The task involves the spouses in living out their original covenant. *The children born to them - and here is the challenge* - should consolidate *that covenant*, enriching and deepening the conjugal communion of the father and mother. When this does not occur, we need to ask if the selfishness which lurks even in the love of man and woman as a result of the human inclination to evil is not stronger than this love. Married couples need to be well aware of this. From the outset they need to have their hearts and thoughts turned towards the God "from whom every family is named," *so that their fatherhood and motherhood will draw from that source the power to be continually renewed in love.*

Fatherhood and motherhood are themselves a particular proof of love; they make it possible to discover love's extension and original depth. But this does not take place automatically. Rather, it is a task entrusted to both husband and wife. In the life of husband and wife together, fatherhood and motherhood represent such a sublime "novelty" and richness as can only be approached "on one's knees."

Experience teaches that human love, which naturally tends towards fatherhood and motherhood, is sometimes affected by a profound *crisis* and is thus seriously threatened. In such cases, help can be sought at marriage and family counseling centers, where it is possible, among other things, to obtain the assistance of specifically trained psychologists and psychotherapists. At the same time, however, we cannot forget the perennial validity of the words of the Apostle: "I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named." Marriage, the Sacrament of



Matrimony, is a covenant of persons in love. And *love can be deepened and preserved only by Love*, that Love which is “poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us” (Rom 5:5). During the Year of the Family should our prayer not concentrate on the crucial and decisive moment of the passage from conjugal love to childbearing, and thus to fatherhood and motherhood? Is that not precisely the moment when there is an indispensable need for the “outpouring of the grace of the Holy Spirit” invoked in the liturgical celebration of the Sacrament of Matrimony?

The Apostle, bowing his knees before the Father, asks that the faithful “be *strengthened* with might *through his Spirit in the inner man*” (Eph 3:16). This “inner strength” is necessary in all family life, especially at its critical moments, when the love which was expressed in the liturgical rite of marital consent with the words, “I promise to be faithful to you always... all the days of my life,” is put to a difficult test.

### *The unity of the two*

8. Only “persons” are capable of saying those words; only they are able to live “in communion” on the basis of a mutual choice which is, or ought to be, fully conscious and free. The Book of Genesis, in speaking of a man who leaves father and mother in order to cleave to his wife (cf. Gen 2:24), highlights *the conscious and free choice* which gives rise to marriage, making the son of a family a husband, and the daughter of a family a wife. How can we adequately understand this mutual choice, unless we take into consideration the full truth about the person, who is a rational and free being? The Second Vatican Council, in speaking of the likeness of God, uses extremely significant terms. It refers not only to the divine image and likeness which every human being as such already possesses, but also and primarily to “a certain similarity between the union of the divine persons and the union of God’s children in truth and love.”<sup>13</sup>

This rich and meaningful formulation first of all confirms what is central to the identity of every man and every woman. This identity consists in the *capacity to live in truth and love*; even more, it consists

<sup>13</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24.

in the need of truth and love as an essential dimension of the life of the person. Man's need for truth and love opens him both to God and to creatures: it opens him to other people, to life "in communion," and in particular to marriage and to the family. In the words of the Council, the "communion" of persons is drawn in a certain sense from the mystery of the Trinitarian "We," and therefore "conjugal communion" also refers to this mystery. The family, which originates in the love of man and woman, ultimately derives from the mystery of God. This conforms to the innermost being of man and woman, to their innate and authentic dignity as persons.

In marriage man and woman are so firmly united as to become — to use the words of the Book of Genesis — "one flesh" (Gen 2:24). Male and female in their physical constitution, the two human subjects, even though physically different, *share equally in the capacity to live "in truth and love."* This capacity, characteristic of the human being as a person, has at the same time both a spiritual and a bodily dimension. It is also through the body that man and woman are predisposed to form a "communion of persons" in marriage. When they are united by the conjugal covenant in such a way as to become "*one flesh*" (Gen 2:24), their *union* ought to take place "*in truth and love,*" and thus express the maturity proper to persons created in the image and likeness of God.

The family which results from this union draws its inner solidity from the covenant between the spouses, which Christ raised to a Sacrament. The family draws its proper character as a community, its traits of "communion," from that fundamental communion of the spouses which is prolonged in their children." *Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?,*" the celebrant asks during the Rite of Marriage.<sup>14</sup> The answer given by the spouses reflects the most profound truth of the love which unites them. Their unity, however, rather than closing them up in themselves, opens them towards a new life, towards a new person. As parents, they will be capable of giving life to a being like themselves, not only bone of their bones and flesh of their flesh (cf. Gen 2:23), but an image and likeness of God - a person.

<sup>14</sup> *Rituale Romanum, Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, n. 60, ed. cit. p. 17.

When the Church asks “Are you willing?,” she is reminding the bride and groom that they stand *before the creative power of God*. They are called to become parents, to cooperate with the Creator in giving life. Cooperating with God to call new human beings into existence means contributing to the transmission of that divine image and likeness of which everyone “born of a woman” is a bearer.

### ***The genealogy of the person***

9. Through the communion of persons which occurs in marriage, a man and a woman begin a family. Bound up with the family is the genealogy of every individual: *the genealogy of the person*. Human fatherhood and motherhood are rooted in biology, yet at the same time transcend it. The Apostle, with knees bowed “before the Father from whom all fatherhood [and motherhood] in heaven and on earth is named,” in a certain sense asks us to look at the whole world of living creatures, from the spiritual beings in heaven to the corporeal beings on earth. Every act of begetting finds its primordial model in the fatherhood of God. Nonetheless, in the case of man, this “cosmic” dimension of likeness to God is not sufficient to explain adequately the relationship of fatherhood and motherhood. When a new person is born of the conjugal union of the two, he brings with him into the world a particular image and likeness of God himself: *the genealogy of the person is inscribed in the very biology of generation*.

In affirming that the spouses, as parents, cooperate with God the Creator in conceiving and giving birth to a new human being,<sup>15</sup> we are not speaking merely with reference to the laws of biology. Instead, we wish to emphasize that *God himself is present in human fatherhood and motherhood* quite differently than he is present in all other instances of begetting “on earth.” Indeed, God alone is the source of that “image and likeness” which is proper to the human being, as it was received at Creation. Begetting is the continuation of Creation.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22 November 1981) 28: AAS 74 (1982), 114.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Humani generis* (12 August 1950): AAS 42 (1950), 574.

And so, both in the conception and in the birth of a new child, parents find themselves face to face with a "great mystery" (cf. Eph 5:32). Like his parents, the *new human being* is also called to live as a person; he is called to a life "*in truth and love.*" This call is not only open to what exists in time, but in God it is also open to eternity. This is the dimension of the genealogy of the person which has been revealed definitively by Christ, who casts the light of his Gospel on human life and death and thus on the meaning of the human family.

As the Council affirms, man is "the only creature on earth whom God willed for its own sake."<sup>17</sup> Man's coming into being does not conform to the laws of biology alone, but also, and directly, to God's creative will, which is concerned with the genealogy of the sons and daughters of human families. God "*willed*" man from the very beginning, and God "*wills*" him in every act of conception and every human birth. God "*wills*" man as a being similar to himself, as a person. This man, every man, is created by God "*for his own sake.*" That is true of all persons, including those born with sicknesses or disabilities. Inscribed in the personal constitution of every human being is the will of God, who wills that man should be, in a certain sense, an end unto himself. God hands man over to himself, entrusting him both to his family and to society as their responsibility. Parents, in contemplating a new human being, are, or ought to be, fully aware of the fact that God "*wills*" this individual "*for his own sake.*"

This concise expression is profoundly rich in meaning. From the very moment of conception, and then of birth, the new being is meant to *express fully his humanity*, to "*find himself*" as a person.<sup>18</sup> This is true for absolutely everyone, including the chronically ill and the disabled. "To be human" is his fundamental vocation: "to be human" in accordance with the gift received, in accordance with that "talent" which is humanity itself, and only then in accordance with other talents. In this sense God wills every man "*for his own sake.*" *In God's plan*, however, the vocation of the human person extends beyond the boundaries of time. It encounters the will of the Father revealed in the

<sup>17</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

Incarnate Word: *God's will is to lavish upon man a sharing in his own divine life.* As Christ says: "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10).

Does affirming man's ultimate destiny not conflict with the statement that God wills man "for his own sake?" If he has been created for divine life, can man truly exist "for his own sake?" This is a critical question, one of great significance both for the beginning of his earthly life and its end: it is important for the whole span of his life. It might appear that in destining man for divine life God definitively takes away man's existing "for his own sake."<sup>19</sup> What then is the relationship between the life of the person and his sharing in the life of the Trinity? Saint Augustine provides us with the answer in his celebrated phrase: "Our heart is restless until it rests in you."<sup>20</sup> This "restless heart" serves to point out that between the one finality and the other there is in fact no contradiction, but rather a relationship, a complementarity, a unity. By his very genealogy, the person created in the image and likeness of God, *exists "for his own sake"* and reaches fulfillment precisely *by sharing in God's life.* The content of this self-fulfillment is the fullness of life in God, proclaimed by Christ (cf. Jn 6:37-40), who redeemed us precisely so that we might come to share it (cf. Mk 10:45).

It is for themselves that married couples want children; in children they see the crowning of their own love for each other. They want children for the family, as a *priceless gift.*<sup>21</sup> This is quite understandable. Nonetheless, in conjugal love and in paternal and maternal love we should find inscribed the same truth about man which the Council expressed in a clear and concise way in its statement that God "willed man for his own sake." It is thus necessary that the will of the parents should be in harmony with the will of God. *They must want the new human creature in the same way as the Creator wants him:* "for himself." Our human will is always and inevitably subject to the law of time and change. The divine will, on the other hand, is eternal. As we read in the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> *Confessiones*, I, 1: CCL 27, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 50.

you were born I consecrated you" (Jer 1:5). The genealogy of the person is thus united with the eternity of God, and only then with human fatherhood and motherhood, which are realized in time. At the moment of conception itself, man is already destined to eternity in God.

### ***The common good of marriage and the family***

10. Marital consent defines and consolidates the *good common to marriage and to the family*. "I, N., take you, N., to be my wife/husband. I promise to be true to you in good times and in bad, in sickness and in health. I will love you and honor you all the days of my life."<sup>22</sup> Marriage is a unique communion of persons, and it is on the basis of this communion that the family is called to become a community of persons. This is a commitment which the bride and groom undertake "before God and his Church," as the celebrant reminds them before they exchange their consent.<sup>23</sup> Those who take part in the rite are witnesses of this commitment, for in a certain sense they represent the Church and society, the settings in which the new family will live and grow.

The words of consent define the common good of *the couple and of the family*. First, the common good of the spouses: love, fidelity, honor, the permanence of their union until death - "all the days of my life." The good of both, which is at the same time the good of each, must then become the good of the children. The common good, by its very nature, both unites individual persons and ensures the true good of each. If the Church (and the State for that matter) receives the consent which the spouses express in the words cited above, she does so because that consent is "written in their hearts" (Rom 2:15). It is the spouses who give their consent to each other by a solemn promise, that is by confirming the truth of that consent in the sight of God. As baptized Christians, they are the ministers of the Sacrament of Matrimony in the Church. Saint Paul teaches that this mutual commitment of theirs is a "great mystery" (Eph 5:32).

The words of consent, then, express what is essential to the common good of the spouses, and *they indicate what ought to be the*

<sup>22</sup> *Rituale Romanum, Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, n. 62, ed. cit., p. 17.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 61, ed. cit., p. 17.

*common good of the future family.* In order to bring this out, the Church asks the spouses if they are prepared to accept the children God grants them and to raise the children as Christians. This question calls to mind the common good of the future family unit, evoking the genealogy of persons which is part of the constitution of marriage and of the family itself. The question about children and their education is profoundly linked to marital consent, with its solemn promise of love, conjugal respect, and fidelity until death. The acceptance and education of children—two of the primary ends of the family—are conditioned by how that commitment will be fulfilled. Fatherhood and motherhood represent a *responsibility which is not simply physical but spiritual in nature*; indeed, through these realities there passes the genealogy of the person, which has its eternal beginning in God and which must lead back to him.

The Year of the Family, as a year of special prayer on the part of families, ought to renew and deepen each family's awareness of these truths. What a wealth of biblical reflections could nourish that prayer! Together with the words of Sacred Scripture, these prayerful reflections should always include the *personal memories of the spouses-parents*, the children and grandchildren. Through the genealogy of persons, conjugal communion *becomes a communion of generations*. The sacramental union of the two spouses, sealed in the covenant which they enter into before God, endures and grows stronger as the generations pass. It must become a union in prayer. But for all this to become clearly apparent during the Year of the Family, prayer needs to become a regular habit in the daily life of each family. Prayer is thanksgiving, praise of God, asking for forgiveness, supplication and invocation. In all of these forms *the prayer of the family has much to say to God*. It also has much to say to others, beginning with the mutual communion of persons joined together by family ties.

The Psalmist asks: "What is man that you keep him in mind?" (Ps 8:4). Prayer is the place where, in a very simple way, the creative and fatherly remembrance of God is made manifest: not only man's remembrance of God, but also and especially *God's remembrance of man*. In this way, the prayer of the family as a community can become a place of common and mutual remembrance: the family is in fact a community of generations. In prayer everyone should be present: the living and those who have died, and also those yet to come into the

world. Families should pray for all of their members, in view of the good which the family is for each individual and which each individual is for the whole family. Prayer strengthens this good, precisely as the common good of the family. Moreover, it creates this good ever anew. In prayer, the family discovers itself as the first "us," in which each member is "I" and "thou;" each member is for the others either husband or wife, father or mother, son or daughter, brother or sister, grandparent or grandchild.

Are all the families to which this Letter is addressed like this? Certainly a good number are, but the times in which we are living tend to restrict family units to two generations. Often this is the case because available housing is too limited, especially in large cities. But it is not infrequently due to the belief that having several generations living together interferes with privacy and makes life too difficult. But is this not where the problem really lies? *Families today have too little "human" life.* There is a shortage of people with whom to create and share the common good; and yet that good, by its nature, demands to be created and shared with others: *bonum est diffusivum sui*: "good is diffusive of itself."<sup>24</sup> The more *common* the good, the *more properly one's own* it will also be: mine - yours - ours. This is the logic behind living according to the good, living in truth and charity. If man is able to accept *and* follow this logic, his life truly becomes a "sincere gift."

### *The sincere gift of self*

11. After affirming that man is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, the Council immediately goes on to say that he cannot "*fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.*"<sup>25</sup> This might appear to be a contradiction, but in fact it is not. Instead it is the magnificent paradox of human existence: an existence called *to see the truth in love*. Love causes man to find fulfillment through the sincere gift of self. To love means to give and to receive something which can be neither bought nor sold, but only given freely and mutually.

<sup>24</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 2.

<sup>25</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24.



By its very nature the gift of the person must be lasting and irrevocable. The indissolubility of marriage flows in the first place from the very essence of that *gift: the gift of one person to another person*. This reciprocal giving of self reveals the *spousal nature of love*. In their marital consent the bride and groom call each other by name: "I...take you... as my wife (as my husband) and I promise to be true to you... for all the days of my life." A gift such as this involves an obligation much more serious and profound than anything which might be "purchased" in any way and at any price. Kneeling before the Father, from whom all fatherhood and motherhood come, the future parents come to realize that they have been "redeemed." They have been purchased at great cost, *by the price* of the most sincere gift of all, *the blood of Christ* of which they partake through the Sacrament. The liturgical crowning of the marriage rite is the Eucharist, the sacrifice of that "Body which has been given up" and that "Blood which has been shed," which in a certain way finds expression in the consent of the spouses.

When a man and woman in marriage mutually give and receive each other in the unity of "one flesh," the logic of the sincere gift of self becomes a part of their life. Without this, marriage would be empty; whereas a communion of persons, built on this logic, becomes a communion of parents. When they transmit *life to the child, a new human "thou" becomes a part of the horizon of the "we" of the spouses*, a person whom they will call by a new name: "our son ... ; our daughter..... "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1), says Eve, the first woman of history: a human being, first expected for nine months and then "revealed" to parents, brothers and sisters. The process from conception and growth in the mother's womb to birth makes it possible to create a space within which the new creature can be revealed as a "gift:" indeed this is what it is from the very beginning. Could this frail and helpless being, totally dependent upon its parents and completely entrusted to them, be seen in any other way? The newborn child gives itself to its parents by the very fact of its coming into existence. *Its existence is already a gift, the first gift of the Creator to the creature.*

*In the newborn child is realized the common good of the family.* Just as the common good of spouses fulfilled in conjugal love, ever ready to give and receive new life, so too the common good of the

family is fulfilled through that same spousal love, as embodied in the newborn child. Part of the genealogy of the person is the genealogy of the family, preserved for posterity by the annotations in the Church's baptismal registers, even though these are merely the social consequence of the fact that "a man has been born into the world" (cf. Jn 16:21).

But is it really true that the new human being is a gift for his parents? A gift for society? Apparently nothing seems to indicate this. On occasion the birth of a child appears to be a simple statistical fact, registered like so many other data in demographic records. It is true that for the parents the birth of a child means more work, new financial burdens and further inconveniences, all of which can lead to the temptation not to want another birth.<sup>26</sup> In some social and cultural contexts this temptation can become very strong. Does this mean that a child is not a gift? That it comes into the world only to take and not to give? These are some of the disturbing questions which men and women today find hard to escape. *A child comes to take up room, when it seems that there is less and less room in the world.* But is it really true that a child brings nothing to the family and society? Is not every child a "particle" of that common good without which human communities breakdown and risk extinction? Could this ever really be denied? The child becomes a gift to its brothers, sisters, parents and entire family. *Its life becomes a gift for the very people who were givers of life* and who cannot help but feel its presence, its sharing in their life and its contribution to their common good and to that of the community of the family. This truth is obvious in its simplicity and profundity, whatever the complexity and even the possible pathology of the psychological make-up of certain persons. *The common good of the whole of society dwells in man; he is, as we recalled, "the way of the Church."*<sup>27</sup> Man is first of all the "glory of God:" "*Gloria Dei vivens homo,*" in the celebrated words of Saint Irenaeus,<sup>28</sup> which might also be translated: "the glory of God is for man to be alive." It could be said that here we encounter the loftiest definition of man: *the glory of God is the common good of all that exists; the common good of the human race.*

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (30 December 1987), 25: AAS 80 (1988), 543-544.

<sup>27</sup> Encyclical Letter *Redemptor hominis* (4 March 1979), 14: AAS 71 (1979), 884-885; cf. Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (1 May 1991), 53: AAS 83 (1991), 859.

Yes! *Man is a common good*: a common good of the family and of humanity, of individual groups and of different communities. But there are significant distinctions of degree and modality in this regard. Man is a common good, for example, of the Nation to which he belongs and of the State of which he is a citizen but in a much more concrete, unique and unrepeatable way he is a common good of his family. He is such not only as an individual who is part of the multitude of humanity, but rather as "*this individual*." God the Creator calls him into existence "for himself;" and in coming into the world he begins, in the family, his "great adventure," the adventure of human life. "This man" has, in every instance, *the right to fulfill himself on the basis of his human dignity*. It is precisely this dignity which establishes a person's place among others, and above all, in the family. The family is indeed - more than any other human reality - the place where an individual can exist "for himself" through the sincere gift of self. This is why it remains a social institution which neither can nor should be replaced: it is the "sanctuary of life."<sup>29</sup>

The fact that a child is being born, that "a child is born into the world" (Jn 16:21) is a *paschal sign*. As we read in the Gospel of John, Jesus himself speaks of this to the disciples before his passion and death, comparing their sadness at his departure with the pains of a woman in labour: "*When a woman is in travail she has sorrow (that is, she suffers), because her hour has come; but when she is delivered of the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a child is born into the world*" (Jn 16:21). The "hour" of Christ's death (cf. Jn 13:1) is compared here to the "hour" of the woman in birthpangs; the birth of a new child fully reflects the victory of life over death brought about by the Lord's Resurrection. This comparison can provide us with material for reflection. Just as the Resurrection of Christ is the manifestation of *Life* beyond the threshold of death, so too the birth of an infant is a manifestation of life, which is always destined, through Christ, for that "*fullness of life*" which is in God himself: "I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). Here we see revealed the deepest meaning of Saint Irenaeus's expression: "*Gloria Dei vivens homo*."

<sup>28</sup> *Adversus Haereses* IV, 20, 7: PG 7, 1057; Sch 100/2, 648-649.

<sup>29</sup> Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (1 May 1991) 39: AAS 83 (1991), 842.

It is the Gospel truth concerning the gift of self, without which the person cannot "fully find himself," which makes possible an appreciation of how profoundly this "sincere gift" is rooted in the gift of God, Creator and Redeemer, and in the "grace of the Holy Spirit" which the celebrant during the Rite of Marriage prays will be "poured out" on the spouses. Without such an "outpouring," it would be very difficult to understand all this and to carry it out as man's vocation. Yet how many people understand this intuitively! Many men and women make this truth their own, coming to discern that only in this truth do they encounter "the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6). *Without this truth, the life of the spouses and of the family will not succeed in attaining a fully human meaning.*

This is why the Church never tires of teaching and of bearing witness to this truth. While certainly showing maternal understanding for the many complex crisis situations in which families are involved, as well as for the moral frailty of every human being, the Church is convinced that she must remain absolutely faithful to the truth about human love. Otherwise she would betray herself. To move away from this saving truth would be to close "the eyes of our hearts" (cf. Eph 1:18), which instead should always stay open to the light which the Gospel sheds on human affairs (cf. 2 Tim 1:10). An awareness of that sincere gift of self whereby man "finds himself" must be constantly renewed and safeguarded in the face of the serious opposition which the Church meets on the part of those who advocate a false civilization of progress.<sup>30</sup> The family always expresses a new dimension of good mankind, and it thus creates a new responsibility. We are speaking of the *responsibility for that particular common good* in which is included the good of the person, of every member of the family community. While certainly a "difficult" good ("*bonum arduum*"), it is also an attractive one.

### ***Responsible fatherhood and motherhood***

12. It is now time, in this Letter to Families, to bring up two closely related questions. The first, more general, concerns the *civilization of love*; the other, more specific, deals with *responsible fatherhood and motherhood*.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Encyclical Letter *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (30 December 1987), 25: AAS 80 (1988), 543-544.

We have already said that marriage engenders particular responsibility for the common good, first of the spouses and then of the family. This common good is constituted by man, by the *worth of the person* and by everything which represents the *measure of his dignity*. This reality is part of man in every social, economic and political system. In the area of marriage and the family, this responsibility becomes, for a variety of reasons, even more "demanding." The Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes* rightly speaks of "*promoting the dignity of marriage and the family*." The Council sees this "promotion" as a duty incumbent upon both the Church and the State. Nevertheless, in every culture this duty remains primarily that of the persons who, united in marriage, form particular family. "Responsible fatherhood and motherhood" express a concrete commitment to carry out this duty, which has taken on new characteristics in the contemporary world.

In particular, responsible fatherhood and motherhood directly concern the moment in which a man and a woman, uniting themselves "in one flesh," can become parents. This is a moment of special value both for their interpersonal relationship and for their service to life: they can become parents - father and mother by communicating life to a new human being. *The two dimensions of conjugal union, unitive and the procreative, cannot be artificially separated* without damaging the deepest truth of the conjugal act itself.<sup>31</sup>

This is the constant teaching of the Church, and the "signs of the times" which we see today are providing new reasons for forcefully reaffirming that teaching. Saint Paul, himself so attentive to the pastoral demands of his day, clearly and firmly indicated the need to be "urgent in season and out of season" (cf. 2 Tim 4:2), and not to be daunted by the fact that "sound teaching is no longer endured" (cf. 2 Tim 4:3). His words are well known to those who, with deep insight into the events of the present time, expect that the Church will not only not abandon "sound doctrine," but will proclaim it with renewed vigour, seeking in today's "signs of the times" the incentive and insights which can lead to a deeper understanding of her teaching.

Some of these insights can be taken from the very sciences which have evolved from the earlier study of anthropology into *various*

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Paul VI, Encyclical Letter *Humanae vitae* (25 July 1968), 12: AAS 60 (1968), 488-489; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2366.

*specialized sciences* such as biology, psychology, sociology and their branches. *In some sense all these sciences revolve around medicine*, which is both a science and an art (*ars medica*), at the service of man's life and health. But the insights in question come first of all from human experience, which, in all its complexity, in some sense both precedes science and follows it.

*Through their own experience spouses come to learn the meaning of responsible fatherhood and motherhood.* They learn it also from the experience of other couples in similar situations and as they become more open to the findings of the various sciences. One could say that "experts" learn in a certain sense from "spouses," so that they in turn will then be in a better position to teach married couples the meaning of responsible procreation and the ways to achieve it.

This subject has been extensively treated in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, the "Propositiones" of the 1980 Synod of Bishops, the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, and in other statements, up to the Instruction *Donum vitae* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Church both teaches the moral truth about responsible fatherhood and motherhood and *protects it from the erroneous views and tendencies which are widespread today*. Why does the Church continue to do this? Is she unaware of the problems raised by those who counsel her to make concessions in this area and who even attempt to persuade her by undue pressures if not even threats? The Church's Magisterium is often chided for being behind the times and closed to the promptings of the spirit of modern times, and for promoting a course of action which is harmful to humanity, and indeed to the Church herself. By obstinately holding to her own positions, it is said, the Church will end up losing popularity, and more and more believers will turn away from her.

But how can it be maintained that *the Church*, especially the College of Bishops in communion with the Pope, is *insensitive to such grave and pressing questions*? It was precisely these extremely important questions which led Pope Paul VI to publish the Encyclical *Humanae vitae*. The foundations of the Church's doctrine concerning responsible fatherhood and motherhood are exceptionally broad and secure. *The Council demonstrates this above all in its teaching on man*, when it affirms that he is "the only creature on earth which God

willed for itself," and that he cannot "fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself."<sup>32</sup> This is so because he has been created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by the only-begotten Son of the Father, who became man for us and for our salvation.

The Second Vatican Council, particularly conscious of the problem of man and his calling, states that the conjugal union, the biblical "*una caro*," can be understood and fully explained *only by recourse to the values of the "person" and of "gift."* Every man and every woman fully realizes himself or herself through the sincere gift of self. For spouses, the moment of conjugal union constitutes a very particular expression of this. It is then that a man and woman, in the "truth" of their masculinity and femininity, become a mutual gift to each other. All married life is a gift; but this becomes most evident when the spouses, in giving themselves to each other in love, bring about that encounter which makes them "one flesh" (Gen 2:24).

*They then experience a moment of special responsibility*, which is also the result of the procreative potential linked to the conjugal act. At that moment, the spouses can become father and mother, initiating the process of a new human life, which will then develop in the woman's womb. If the wife is the first to realize that she has become a mother, the husband, to whom she has been united in "one flesh," then learns this when she tells him that he has become a father. Both are responsible for their potential and later actual fatherhood and motherhood. The husband can not fail to acknowledge and accept the result of a decision which has also been his own. He cannot hide behind expressions such as: "I don't know," "I didn't want it," or "you're the one who wanted it." In every case conjugal union involves *the responsibility of the man and of the woman*, a potential responsibility which becomes actual when the circumstances dictate. This is true especially for the man. Although he too is involved in the beginning of the generative process, he is left biologically distant from it; it is within the woman that the process develops. How can the man fail to assume responsibility? The man and the woman must assume together, before themselves and before others, the responsibility for the new life which they have brought into existence.

<sup>32</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24.

This conclusion is shared by the human sciences themselves. There is however a need for more in depth study, analyzing the meaning of the conjugal act in view of the values of the "person" and of the "gift" mentioned above. This is what the Church has done in her constant teaching, and in a particular way at the Second Vatican Council.

In the conjugal act, husband and wife are called to confirm in a responsible way *the mutual gift of self* which they have made to each other in the marriage covenant. The logic of the *total gift of self to the other* involves a potential openness to procreation: in this way the marriage is called to even greater fulfillment as a family. Certainly the mutual gift of husband and wife does not have the begetting of children as its only end, but is in itself a mutual communion of love and of life. *The intimate truth of this gift* must always be *safeguarded*. "Intimate" is not here synonymous with "subjective." Rather, it means essentially in conformity with the objective truth of the man and woman who give themselves. The person can never be considered a means to an end; above all never a means of "pleasure." The person is and must be nothing other than the end of every act. Only then does the action correspond to the true dignity of the person.

In concluding our reflection on this important and sensitive subject, I wish to offer special encouragement above all to you, dear married couples, and to all who assist you in understanding and putting into practice the Church's teaching on marriage and on responsible motherhood and fatherhood. I am thinking in particular about pastors and the many scholars, theologians, philosophers, writers and journalists who have resisted the powerful trend to cultural conformity and are courageously ready to "swim against the tide." This encouragement also goes to an increasing number of experts, physicians and educators who are authentic lay apostles for whom the promotion of the dignity of marriage and the family has become an important task in their lives. In the name of the Church I express my gratitude to all! What would priests, Bishops and even the Successor of Peter be able to do without you? From the first years of my priesthood I have become increasingly convinced of this, from when I began to sit in the *confessional* to share the concerns, fears and hopes of many married couples. I met difficult cases of rebellion and refusal, but at the same time so many marvelously responsible and



generous persons! In writing this Letter I have all those married couples in mind, and I embrace them with my affection and my prayer.

### ***The two civilizations***

13. Dear families, the question of responsible fatherhood and motherhood is an integral part of the "civilization of love," which I now wish to discuss with you. From what has already been said it is clear that *the family is fundamental to what Pope Paul VI called the "civilization of love,"*<sup>33</sup> an expression which has entered the teaching of the Church and by now has become familiar. Today it is difficult to imagine a statement by the Church, or about the Church, which does not mention the civilization of love. The phrase *is linked to the tradition of the "domestic church" in early Christianity*, but it has a particular significance for the present time. Etymologically the word "civilization" is derived from "*civis*" - "citizen" and it emphasizes the civic or political dimension of the life of every individual. But the most profound meaning of the term "civilization" is not merely political, but rather pertains to human culture. Civilization belongs to human history because it answers man's spiritual and moral needs. Created in the image and likeness of God, man has received the world from the hands of the Creator, together with the task of shaping it in his own image and likeness. The fulfillment of this task gives rise to civilization, which in the final analysis is nothing else than the "humanization of the world."

In a certain sense civilization means the same thing as "culture." And so one could also speak of the "*culture of love*," even though it is preferable to keep to the now familiar expression. The civilization of love, in its current meaning, is inspired by the words of the conciliar Constitution *Gaudium et spes*: "*Christ... fully discloses man to himself and unfolds his noble calling.*"<sup>34</sup> And so we can say that the civilization of love originates in the revelation of the God who "is love," as John writes (1 Jn 4:8, 16); it is effectively described by Paul in the hymn of charity found in his First Letter to the Corinthians (13:1-13).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Homily for the Closing of the Holy Year (25 December 1975): AAS 68 (1976), 145.

<sup>34</sup> Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 22.

This civilization is intimately linked to the love "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us" (Rom 5:5), and it grows as a result of the *constant cultivation* which the Gospel allegory of the vine and the branches describes in such a direct way: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (Jn 15:1-2).

In the light of these and other texts of the New Testament it is possible to understand what is meant by the "civilization of love," and why the *family is organically linked to this civilization*. If the first "way of the Church" is the family, it should also be said that the civilization of love is also the "way of the Church," which journeys through the world and summons families to this way; it summons also other social, national and international institutions, because of families and through families. *The family in fact depends for several reasons on the civilization of love, and finds therein the reasons for its existence as family. And at the same time the family is the centre and the heart of the civilization of love.*

Yet there is no true love without an awareness that God "is Love" - and that man is the only creature on earth which God has called into existence "for its own sake." Created in the image and likeness of God, man cannot fully "find himself" except through the sincere gift of self. Without such a concept of man, of the person and the "communion of persons" in the family, there can be no civilization of love; similarly, without the civilization of love it is impossible to have *such a concept of person and of the communion of persons*. The family constitutes the fundamental "cell" of society. But Christ - the "vine" from which the "branches" draw nourishment - is needed so that this cell will not be exposed to the threat of a kind of *cultural uprooting* which can come both from within and from without. Indeed, although there is on the one hand the "civilization of love," there continues to exist on the other hand *the possibility of a destructive "anti-civilization,"* as so many present trends and situations confirm.

Who can deny that our age is one marked by a great crisis, which appears above all as a profound "*crisis of truth*?" A crisis of truth means, in the first place, a *crisis of concepts*. Do the words "love," "freedom," "sincere gift," and even "person" and "rights of the person," really convey their essential meaning? This is why the Encyclical on

the "splendour of truth" (*Veritatis splendor*) has proved so meaningful and important for the Church and for the world especially in the West. Only if the truth about freedom and the communion of persons in marriage and in the family can regain its splendour, will the building of the civilization of love truly begin and will it then be possible to speak concretely - as the Council did - about promoting the dignity of marriage and the family."<sup>36</sup>

Why is the "splendour of truth" so important? First of all, by way of contrast: the development of contemporary civilization is linked to a scientific and technological progress which is often achieved in a one-sided way, and thus appears purely positivistic. Positivism, as we know, results in agnosticism in theory and utilitarianism in practice and in ethics. In our own day, history is in a way repeating itself. *Utilitarianism* is a civilization of production and of use, a civilization of "things" and not of "persons," a civilization in which persons are used in the same way as things are used. In the context of a civilization of use, woman can become an object for man, children a hindrance to parents, the family an institution obstructing the freedom of its members. To be convinced that this is the case, one need only look at *certain sexual education programmes* introduced into the schools, often notwithstanding the disagreement and even the protests of many parents; or *pro-abortion tendencies* which vainly try to hide behind the so-called "light to choose" ("*Pro-choice*") on the part of both spouses, and in particular on the part of the woman. These are only two examples; many more could be mentioned.

It is evident that in this sort of a cultural situation the family cannot fail to feel threatened, since it is endangered at its very foundations. Everything contrary to the *civilization of love* is contrary to the whole truth about man and becomes a threat to him: it does not allow him to find himself and to feel secure, as spouse, parent, or child. So-called "safe sex," which is touted by the "civilization of technology," is actually, in view of the overall requirements of the person, radically *not safe*, indeed it is extremely dangerous. It endangers both the person and the family. And what is this danger? It is *the loss of the truth about one's own self and about the family*, together with the risk of a loss of *freedom* and consequently of a loss of *love* itself. "You will know the truth," Jesus says, "and the truth will make you free" (Jn

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, n. 47.

8:32): the truth, and only the truth, will prepare you for a love which can be called “fairest love” (cf. Sir 24:24, Vulg.).

The contemporary family, like families in every age, *is searching for “fairest love.”* A love which is not “fairest,” but reduced only to the satisfaction of concupiscence (cf. 1 Jn 2:16), or to a man’s and a woman’s mutual “use” of each other, makes persons *slaves to their weaknesses*. Do not certain modern “cultural agendas” lead to this enslavement? There are agendas which “play” on man’s weaknesses, and thus make him increasingly weak and defenseless.

*The civilization of love evokes joy:* joy, among other things, for the fact that a man has come into the world (cf. Jn 16:21), and consequently because spouses have become parents. The civilization of love means “rejoicing in the right” (cf. 1 Cor 13:6). But a civilization inspired by a consumerist, anti-birth mentality is not and cannot ever be a civilization of love. If the family is so important for the civilization of love, it is because of the particular *closeness and intensity of the bonds* which come to be between persons and generations within the family. However, the family remains *vulnerable* and can easily fall prey to dangers which weaken it or actually destroy its unity and stability. As a result of these dangers families cease to be witnesses of the civilization of love and can even become a negation of it, a kind of *counter-sign*. A broken family can, for its part, consolidate a specific form of “anti-civilization,” destroying love in its various expressions, with inevitable consequences for the whole of life in society.

### ***Love is demanding***

14. The love which the Apostle Paul celebrates in the First Letter to the Corinthians - the love which is “*patient*” and “*kind*,” and “*endures all things*” (1 Cor 13:4, 7) - is certainly a *demanding love*. But this is precisely the source of its beauty: by the very fact that it is demanding, it builds up the true good of man and allows it to radiate to others. The good, says Saint Thomas, is by its nature “diffusive.”<sup>36</sup> Love is true when *it creates the good of persons and of communities*; it creates that good and *gives it* to others. Only the one who is able to be demanding with himself in the name of love can also demand love

<sup>36</sup> *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 5, a. 4, ad 2.

from others. Love is demanding. It makes demands in all human situations; it is even more demanding in the case of those who are open to the Gospel. Is this not what Christ proclaims in "his" commandment? Nowadays people need to rediscover this demanding love, for it is the truly firm foundation of the family, a foundation able to "endure all things." According to the Apostle, love is not able to "endure all things" if it yields to "jealousies," or if it is "boastful... arrogant or rude" (cf. 1 Cor 13:5-6). True love, Saint Paul teaches, is different: "Love believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7). This is the very love which "endures all things." At work within it is the power and strength of God himself, who "is love" (1 Jn 4:8, 16). At work within it is also the power and strength of Christ, the Redeemer of man and Saviour of the world.

Meditating on the thirteenth chapter of the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, we set out on a path which leads us to understand quickly and clearly the full truth about the civilization of love. No other biblical text expresses this truth so simply and so profoundly as the *hymn to love*.

The dangers faced by love are also dangers for the civilization of love, because they promote everything capable of effectively opposing it. Here one thinks first of all of *selfishness*, not only the selfishness of individuals, but also of couples or, even more broadly, of social selfishness, that for example of a class or nation (nationalism). Selfishness in all its forms is directly and radically opposed to the civilization of love. But is love to be defined simply as "anti-selfishness?" This would be a very impoverished and ultimately a purely negative definition, even though it is true that different forms of selfishness must be overcome in order to realize love and the civilization of love. It would be more correct to speak of "altruism," which is the opposite of selfishness. But far richer and more complete is the concept of love illustrated by Saint Paul. The hymn to love in the First Letter to the Corinthians remains the *Magna Charta* of the civilization of love. In this concept, what is important is not so much individual actions (whether selfish or altruistic), so much as the radical acceptance of the understanding of man as a person who "finds himself" by making a sincere gift of self. A gift is, obviously, "for others:" this is the *most important dimension* of the civilization of love.

We thus come to the very heart of the Gospel truth about *freedom*. The person realizes himself by the exercise of freedom in truth. Freedom cannot be understood as a license to do *absolutely anything*: it means a *gift of self*. Even more: it means an *interior discipline of the gift*. The idea of gift contains not only the free initiative of the subject, but also the aspect of *duty*. All this is made real in the "communion of persons." We find ourselves again at the very heart of each family.

Continuing this line of thought, we also *come upon the antithesis between individualism and personalism*. Love, the civilization of love, is bound up with personalism. Why with personalism? And *why does individualism threaten the civilization of love*? We find a key to answering this in the Council's expression, a "sincere gift." Individualism presupposes a use of freedom in which the subject does what he wants, in which he himself is the one to "establish the truth" of whatever he finds pleasing or useful. He does not tolerate the fact that someone else "wants" or demands something from him in the name of an objective truth. He does not want to "give" to another on the basis of truth; he does not want to become a "sincere gift." Individualism thus remains egocentric and selfish. The real antithesis between individualism and personalism emerges not only on the level of theory, but even more *on that of "ethos."* The "ethos" of personalism is altruistic: it moves the person to become a gift for others and to discover joy in giving himself. This is the joy about which Christ speaks (cf. Jn 15:11; 16:20, 22).

What is needed then is for human societies, and the families who live within them, often in a context of struggle between the civilization of love and its opposites, to seek their solid foundation in a correct vision of man and of everything which determines the full "realization" of his humanity. *Opposed to the civilization of love* is certainly the phenomenon of so-called "*free love*;" this is particularly dangerous because it is usually suggested as a way of following one's "real" feelings, but it is in fact destructive of love. How many families have been ruined because of "free love!" To follow in every instance a "real" emotional impulse by invoking a love "liberated" from all conditionings, means nothing more than to make the individual a slave to those human instincts which Saint Thomas calls "passions of the soul."<sup>37</sup> "Free love" exploits human weaknesses; it gives them a

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., I-II, q. 22.

certain "veneer" of respectability with the help of seduction and the blessing of public opinion. In this way there is an attempt to "soothe" consciences by creating a "moral alibi." But not all of the consequences are taken into consideration, especially when the ones who end up paying are, apart from the other spouse, the children, deprived of a father or mother and condemned to be in fact *orphans of living parents*.

As we know, at the foundation of ethical utilitarianism there is the continual quest for "maximum" happiness. But this is a "*utilitarian happiness*," seen only as pleasure, as immediate gratification for the exclusive benefit of the individual, apart from or opposed to the objective demands of the true good.

The programme of utilitarianism, based on an individualistic understanding of freedom - *a freedom without responsibilities* - is the opposite of love, even as an expression of human civilization considered as a whole. When this concept of freedom is embraced by society, and quickly allies itself with varied forms of human weakness, it soon proves a systematic and permanent threat to the family. In this regard, one could mention many dire consequences, which can be statistically verified, even though a great number of them are hidden in the hearts of men and women like painful, fresh wounds.

*The love of spouses and parents has the capacity to cure these kinds of wounds*, provided the dangers alluded to do not deprive it of its regenerative force, which is so beneficial and wholesome a thing for human communities. This capacity depends on the divine grace of forgiveness and reconciliation, which always ensures the spiritual energy to begin anew. For this very reason family members need to encounter Christ in the Church through the wonderful Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation.

In this context, we can realize how important *prayer* is with families and for families, in particular for those threatened by division. We need to pray that married couples *will love their vocation*, even when the road becomes difficult, or the paths become narrow, uphill and seemingly insuperable; we need to pray that, even then, they will be faithful to their covenant with God.

"The family is the way of the Church." In this Letter we wish both to profess and to proclaim *this way*, which leads to the kingdom

of heaven (cf. Mt 7:14) through conjugal and family life. It is important that the "communion of persons" in the family should become a preparation for the "communion of Saints." This is why the Church both believes and proclaims the love which "endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7); with Saint Paul she sees in it "*the greatest*" virtue of all (cf. 1 Cor 13:13). The Apostle puts no limits on anyone. Everyone is called to love, including spouses and families. In the Church everyone is called equally to perfect holiness (cf. Mt 5:48).<sup>38</sup>

### ***The 4th commandment: "Honour your father and your mother"***

15. The fourth commandment of the Decalogue deals with the family and its interior unity - its solidarity, we could say.

In its formulation, the fourth commandment does not explicitly mention the family. In fact, however, this is its real subject matter. In order to bring out the communion between generations, *the divine Legislator could find no more appropriate word than this*: "Honour..." (Ex 20:12). Here we meet another way of expressing what the family is. This formulation does not exalt the family in some "artificial" way, but emphasizes its subjectivity and the lights flowing from it. The family is a community of particularly intense interpersonal relationships: between spouses, between parents and children, between generations. It is a community which must be safeguarded in a special way. And God cannot find a better safeguard than this: "Honour."

"Honour your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives to you" (Ex 20:12). This commandment comes after the three basic precepts which concern the relation of the individual and the people of Israel with God: "*Shema, Izrael...*," "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord" (Dt 6:4). "You will have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:3). This is the first and greatest commandment, the commandment of love for God "above all else:" God is to be loved "with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might" (Dt 6:5; cf. Mt 22:37). It is significant that the fourth commandment is placed in this particular context. "Honour your father and your mother," because for you they are in a certain sense representatives of the Lord; they are the ones

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, nn. 11, 40 and 41.



who gave you life, who introduced you to human existence in a particular family line, nation and culture. After God, they are your first benefactors. While God alone is good, indeed the Good itself, parents participate in this supreme goodness in a unique way. And so, honour your parents! *There is a certain analogy here with the worship owed to God.*

*The fourth commandment* is closely linked to the *commandment of love*. The bond between "honour" and "love" is a deep one. Honour, at its very centre, is connected with the virtue of justice, but the latter, for its part, cannot be explained fully without reference to love: the love of God and of one's neighbour. And who is more of a neighbour than one's own family members, parents and children?

Is the system of interpersonal relations indicated by the fourth commandment one-sided? Does it bind us only to honour our parents? Taken literally, it does. But indirectly we can speak of the "*honour owed to children by their parents*." "To honour" means to acknowledge! We could put it this way: "let yourself be guided by the firm acknowledgment of the person, first of all that of your father and mother, and then that of the other members of the family." Honour is essentially an attitude of unselfishness. It could be said that it is "a sincere gift of person to person," and in that sense honour converges with love. If the fourth commandment demands that honour should be shown to our father and mother, it also makes this demand out of concern for the good of the family. Precisely for this reason, however, it makes demands of the parents themselves. You parents, the divine precept seems to say, should act in such a way that your life *will merit the honour* (and the love) of your children! Do not let the divine command that you be honoured fall into a moral vacuum! Ultimately then we are speaking of *mutual honour*. The commandment "honour your father and your mother" indirectly tells parents: Honour your sons and your daughters. They deserve this because they are alive, because they are who they are, and this is true from the first moment of their conception. The fourth commandment then, by expressing the intimate bonds uniting the family, highlights the basis of its inner unity.

The commandment goes on to say: "*that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you.*" The conjunction "that" might give the impression of an almost "utilitarian" calcula-

tion: honour them so that you will have a long life. In any event, this does not lessen the fundamental meaning of the imperative "honour," which by its nature suggests an *attitude of unselfishness*. To honour never means: "calculate the benefits." It is difficult, on the other hand, not to acknowledge the fact that an attitude of mutual honour among members of the family community also brings certain advantages. "*Honour*" is certainly something useful, just as every true good is "useful."

In the first place, the family achieves the good of "being together." This is the good par excellence of marriage (hence its indissolubility) and of the family community. It could also be defined as a good of the subject as such. Just as the person is a subject, so too is the family, since it is made up of persons, who, joined together by a profound bond of communion, form a single *communal subject*. Indeed, the family is more a subject than any other social institution: more so than the nation or the State, more so than society and international organizations. These societies, especially nations, possess a proper subjectivity to the extent that they receive it from persons and their families. Are all these merely "theoretical" observations, formulated for the purpose of "exalting" the family before public opinion? No, but they are another way of expressing what the family is. And this too can be deduced from the fourth commandment.

This truth deserves to be emphasized more deeply understood: indeed it brings out the importance of the fourth commandment for the modern system of *human rights*. Institutions and legal systems employ juridical language. But God says: "honour." All "human rights" are ultimately fragile and ineffective, if at their root they lack the command to "honour;" in other words, if they lack an *acknowledgment of the individual* simply because he is an individual, "this" individual. *Of themselves, rights are not enough.*

It is not an exaggeration to reaffirm that the life of nations, of states, and of international organizations "passes" through the family and "is based" on the fourth commandment of the Decalogue. The age in which we live, notwithstanding the many juridical Declarations which have been drafted, is still threatened to a great extent by "*alienation*." This is the result of "Enlightenment" premises according to which a man is "more" human if he is "only" human. It is not difficult to notice how alienation from everything belonging in

various ways to the full richness of man threatens our times. And this affects the family. Indeed, *the affirmation of the person* is in great measure to be referred back to *the family* and consequently to the fourth commandment. In God's plan the family is in many ways the first school of how to be human. *Be human!* This is the imperative passed on in the family - human as the son or daughter of one's country, a citizen of the State, and, we would say today, a citizen of the world. The God who gave humanity the fourth commandment is "benevolent" towards man (*philanthropos*, as the Greeks said). The Creator of the universe is *the God of love and of life*: he wants man to have life and have it abundantly, as Christ proclaims (cf. Jn 10:10); that he may have life, first of all thanks to the family.

At this point it seems clear that the "civilization of love" is strictly bound up with the family. *For many people the civilization of love is still a pure utopia.* Indeed, there are those who think that love cannot be demanded from anyone and that it cannot be imposed: love should be a free choice which people can take or leave.

There is some truth in all this. And yet there is always the fact that Jesus Christ left us the commandment of love, just as God on Mount Sinai ordered: "Honour your father and your mother." Love then is not a utopia: it is given to mankind as a task to be carried out with the help of divine grace. It is entrusted to man and woman, in the Sacrament of Matrimony, as the basic principle of their "duty," and it becomes the foundation of their mutual responsibility: first as spouses, then as father and mother. In the celebration of the Sacrament, the spouses give and receive each other, declaring their willingness to welcome children and to educate them. On this hinges human civilization, which cannot be defined as anything other than a "civilization of love."

The family is an expression and source of this love. *Through the family passes the primary current of the civilization of love, which finds therein its "social foundations."*

The Fathers of the Church, in the Christian tradition, have spoken of the family as a "domestic church," a "little church." They thus referred to the civilization of love as a possible system of human life and coexistence: "to be together" as a family, to be for one another, to make room in a community for affirming each person as such, for affirming "this" individual person. At times it is a matter of people

with physical or psychological handicaps, of whom the so-called "progressive" society would prefer to be free. Even the family can end up like this kind of society. It does so when it hastily rids itself of people who are aged, disabled or sick. This happens when there is a loss of faith in that *God for whom "all live"* (cf. Lk 20:38) and are called to the fullness of Life.

Yes, *the civilization of love is possible; it is not a utopia*. But it is only possible by a constant and ready reference to the "Father from whom all fatherhood [and motherhood] on earth is named" (cf. Eph 3:14-15), from whom every human family comes.

## ***Education***

16. *What is involved in raising children?* In answering this question two fundamental truths should be kept in mind: first, that man is called to live in truth and love; and second, that everyone finds fulfillment through the sincere gift of self. This is true both for the educator and for the one being educated. Education is thus a unique process for which the mutual communion of persons has immense importance. *The educator* is a person who "*begets*" in a spiritual sense. From this point of view, *raising children can be considered a genuine apostolate*. It is a living means of communication, which not only creates a profound relationship between the educator and the one being educated, but also makes them both sharers in truth and love, that final goal to which everyone is called by God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Fatherhood and motherhood presume the coexistence and interaction of autonomous subjects. This is quite evident in the case of the mother when she conceives a new human being. The first months of the child's presence in the mother's womb bring about a particular bond which already possesses an educational significance of its own. *The mother, even before giving birth, does not only give shape to the child's body, but also, in an indirect way, to the child's whole personality*. Even though, we are speaking about a process in which the mother primarily affects the child, we should not overlook the unique influence that the unborn child has on its mother. In this *mutual influence* which will be revealed to the outside world following the birth of the child, the father does not have a direct part to play. But he should be responsibly committed to providing attention and

support throughout the pregnancy and, if possible, at the moment of birth.

For the “civilization of love” it is essential that *the husband should recognize that the motherhood of his wife is a gift*: this is enormously important for the entire process of raising children. Much will depend on his willingness to take his own part in this first stage of the gift of humanity, and to become willingly involved as a husband and father in the motherhood of his wife.

Education then is before all else a *reciprocal “offering” on the part of both parents*: together they communicate their own mature humanity to the newborn child, who gives them in turn the newness and freshness of the humanity which it has brought into the world. This is the case even when children are born with mental or physical disabilities. Here, the situation of the children can enhance the very special courage needed to raise them.

With good reason, then, the Church asks during the Rite of Marriage: “Will you accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?”<sup>39</sup> In the raising of children conjugal love is expressed as authentic parental love. The “communion of persons,” expressed as conjugal love at the beginning of the family, is thus completed and brought to fulfillment in the raising of children. Every individual born and raised in a family constitutes a potential treasure which must be responsibly accepted, so that it will not be diminished or lost, but will rather come to an ever more mature humanity. This too is a *process of exchange* in which the parents-educators are in turn to a certain degree educated themselves. While they are teachers of humanity for their own children, they learn humanity from them. All this clearly brings out the *organic structure of the family*, and reveals the fundamental meaning of the fourth commandment.

In rearing children, the “*we*” of the parents, of husband and wife, develops into the “*we*” of the family, which is grafted on to earlier generations, and is open to gradual expansion. In this regard both grandparents and grandchildren play their own individual roles.

<sup>39</sup> *Rituale Romanum, Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium*, n. 60, ed. cit., p. 17.

If it is true that by giving life *parents* share in God's creative work, it is also true that by raising their children they *become sharers in his paternal and at the same time maternal way of teaching*. According to Saint Paul, God's fatherhood is the primordial model of all fatherhood and motherhood in the universe (cf. Eph 3:14-15), and of human motherhood and fatherhood in particular. We have been completely instructed in God's own way of teaching by the eternal Word of the Father who, by becoming man, revealed to man the authentic and integral greatness of his humanity, that is, being a child of God. In this way he also revealed the true meaning of human education. *Through Christ* all education, within the family and outside of it, *becomes part of God's own saving pedagogy*, which is addressed to individuals and families and culminates in the Paschal Mystery of the Lord's Death and Resurrection. The "heart" of our redemption is the starting-point of every process of Christian education, which is likewise always an education to a full humanity.

*Parents are the first and most important educators* of their own children, and they also possess a *fundamental competence* in this area: they are *educators because they are parents*. They share their educational mission with other individuals or institutions, such as the Church and the State. But the mission of education must always be carried out in accordance with a proper application of the *principle of subsidiarity*. This implies the legitimacy and indeed the need of giving assistance to the parents, but finds its intrinsic and absolute limit in their prevailing right and their actual capabilities. The principle of subsidiarity is thus at the service of parental love, meeting the good of the family unit. For parents by themselves are not capable of satisfying every requirement of the whole process of raising children, especially in matters concerning their schooling and the entire gamut of socialization. Subsidiarity thus complements paternal and maternal love and confirms its fundamental nature, inasmuch as all other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities *in the name of the parents, with their consent* and, to a certain degree, *with their authorization*.

The process of education ultimately leads to the phase of *self-education*, which occurs when the individual, after attaining an appropriate level of psychophysical maturity, *begins to "educate himself on his own."* In time, self-education goes beyond the earlier

results achieved by the educational process, in which it continues to be rooted. An adolescent is exposed to new people and new surroundings, particularly teachers and classmates, who exercise an influence over his life which can be either helpful or harmful. At this stage he distances himself somewhat from the education received in the family, assuming at times a critical attitude with regard to his parents. Even so, the process of self-education cannot fail to be marked by the educational influence which the family and school have on children and adolescents. Even when they grow up and set out on their own path, young people remain intimately linked to their *existential roots*.

Against this background, we can see the meaning of the fourth commandment, "*Honour your father your mother*" (Ex 20:12) in a new way. It is closely linked to the whole process of education. Fatherhood and motherhood, this first and basic fact in the *gift of humanity*, open up before both parents and children new and profound perspectives. To give birth according to the flesh means to set in motion a further "birth," one which is gradual and complex and which continues in the whole process of education. The commandment of the Decalogue calls for a child to honour its father and mother. But, as we saw above, that same commandment enjoins upon parents a kind of corresponding or "symmetrical" duty. Parents also called to "honour" their children, whether are young or old. This attitude is needed throughout the process of their education, including the time of their schooling. The "*principle of giving honour*," the recognition and respect due to man precisely because he is a man, is the basic condition for every authentic educational process.

In the sphere of education the *Church* has a specific role to play. In the light of Tradition and the teaching of the Council, it can be said that it is not only a matter of *entrusting the Church* with the person's religious and moral education, but of promoting the entire process of the person's education "*together with*" the *Church*. The family is called to carry out its education *in the Church*, thus sharing in her life and mission. The *Church* wishes to carry out her educational mission above all *through families* who are made capable of undertaking this task by the Sacrament of Matrimony, through the "grace of state" which follows from it and the specific "charism" proper to the entire family community.

Certainly one area in which the family has an irreplaceable role is that of *religious education*, which enables the family to grow as a "domestic church." Religious education and the catechesis of children make the family a true *subject of evangelization and the apostolate* within the Church. We are speaking of a right intrinsically linked to the *principle of religious liberty*. Families, and more specifically parents, are free to choose for their children a particular kind of religious and moral education consonant with their own convictions. Even when they entrust these responsibilities to ecclesiastical institutions or to schools administered by religious personnel, their educational presence ought to continue to be *constant and active*.

Within the context of education, due attention must be paid to the essential question of *choosing a vocation*, and here in particular that of *preparing for marriage*. The Church has made notable efforts to promote marriage preparation, for example by offering courses for engaged couples. All this is worthwhile and necessary. But it must not be forgotten that preparing for future life as a couple is *above all the task of the family*. To be sure, only spiritually mature families can adequately assume that responsibility. Hence we should point out the need for a special *solidarity among families*. This can be expressed in various practical ways, as for example by associations of families for families. The institution of the family is strengthened by such expressions of solidarity, which bring together not only individuals but also communities, with a commitment to pray together and to seek together the answers to life's essential questions. Is this not an invaluable expression of the *apostolate of families* to one another? It is important that families attempt to build bonds of solidarity among themselves. This allows them to assist each other in the educational enterprise: parents are educated by other parents, and children by other children. Thus a particular tradition of education is created, which draws strength from the character of the "domestic church" proper to the family.

*The gospel of love* is the inexhaustible source of all that nourishes the human family as a "communion of persons." In love the whole educational process finds its support and definitive meaning as the mature fruit of the parents' mutual gift. Through the efforts, sufferings and disappointments which are part of every person's education, love is constantly being put to the test. To pass the test, a source of spiritual strength is necessary. This is only found in the One who "loved to the end" (Jn 13:1). Thus *education is fully a part of the*



*“civilization of love.”* It depends on the civilization of love and, in great measure, contributes to its upbuilding.

The Church’s constant and trusting prayer during the Year of the Family is *for the education of man*, so that families will persevere in their task of education with courage, trust and hope, in spite of difficulties occasionally so serious as to appear insuperable. The Church prays that the forces of the “civilization of love,” which have their source in the love of God, will be triumphant. These are forces which the Church ceaselessly expends for the good of the whole human family.

### ***Family and society***

17. The family is a community of persons and the smallest social unit. As such it is an *institution* fundamental to the life of every society.

What does the family as an institution expect from society? First of all, it expects a *recognition of its identity* and an acceptance of its *status as a subject in society*. This “social subjectivity” is bound up with the proper identity of marriage and the family. Marriage, which undergirds the institution of the family, is constituted by the covenant whereby “a man and a woman establish between themselves a partnership of their whole life,” and which “of its own very nature is ordered to the well-being of the spouses and to the procreation and upbringing of children.”<sup>40</sup> Only such a union can be recognized and ratified as a “marriage” in society. Other interpersonal unions which do not fulfill the above conditions cannot be recognized, despite certain growing trends which represent a serious threat to the future of the family and of society itself.

No human society can run the risk of permissiveness in fundamental issues regarding the nature of marriage and the family! Such moral permissiveness cannot fail to damage the authentic requirements of peace and communion among people. It is thus quite understandable why the Church vigorously defends the identity of the family and encourages responsible individuals and institutions, especially political leaders and international organizations, not to yield to the temptation of a superficial and false modernity.

<sup>40</sup> *Code of Canon Law*, Canon 1055, §1; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1601.

As a community of love and life, the family is a firmly grounded social reality. It is also, in a way entirely its own, a *sovereign society*, albeit conditioned in certain ways. This affirmation of the family's sovereignty as an institution and the recognition of the various ways in which it is conditioned naturally leads to the subject of *family rights*. In this regard, the Holy See published in 1983 the *Charter of the Rights of the Family*; even today this document has lost none of its relevance.

The rights of the family are closely *linked to the rights of the person*: if in fact the family is a communion of persons, its self-realization will depend in large part on the correct application of the rights of its members. Some of these rights concern the family in an immediate way, such as the right of parents to responsible procreation and the education of children. Other rights however touch the family unit only indirectly: among these, the right to property, especially to what is called family property, and the right to work are of special importance.

But the rights of the family *are not simply the sum total of the rights of the person*, since the family is *much* more than the sum of its individual members. It is a community of parents and children, and at times a community of several generations. For this reason its, "status as a subject," which is grounded in God's plan, gives rise to and calls for certain proper and specific rights. *The Charter of the Rights of the Family*, on the basis of the moral principles mentioned above, consolidates the existence of the institution of the family in the social and juridical order of the "greater" society - those of the nation, of the State and of international communities. Each of these "greater" societies is at least indirectly conditioned by the existence of the family. As a result, the definition of the rights and duties of the "greater" society with regard to the family is an extremely important and even essential issue.

In the first place there is the almost organic link existing between *the family and the nation*. Naturally we cannot speak in all cases about a nation in the proper sense. Ethnic groups still exist which, without being able to be considered true nations, do fulfill to some extent the function of a "greater" society. In both cases, the link of the family with the ethnic group or the nation is founded above all

on a *participation in its culture*. In one sense, parents also give birth to children for the nation, so that they can be members of it and can share in its historic and cultural heritage. From the very outset the identity of the family is to some extent shaped by the identity of the nation to which it belongs.

By sharing in the nation's cultural heritage, the family contributes to that *specific sovereignty*, which has its origin in a distinct culture and language. I addressed this subject at the UNESCO Conference meeting in Paris in 1980, and, given its unquestionable importance, I have often returned to it. Not only the nations, but every family realizes its *spiritual sovereignty* through culture and language. Were this not true, it would be very difficult to explain many events in the history of peoples, especially in Europe. From these events, ancient and modern, inspiring and painful, glorious and humiliating, it becomes clear how much the family is an organic part of the nation, and the nation of the family.

In regard to the *State*, the link with the family is somewhat similar and at the same time somewhat dissimilar. The State, in fact, is distinct from the nation; it has a less "family-like" structure, since it is organized in accordance with a political system and in a more "bureaucratic" fashion. Nonetheless, the apparatus of the State also has, in some sense, a "soul" of its own, to the extent that it lives up to its nature as a "political community" juridically ordered towards the common good.<sup>41</sup> Closely linked to this "soul" is the family, which is connected with the State precisely by reason of the *principle of subsidiarity*. Indeed, the family is a social reality which does not have readily available all the means necessary to carry out its proper ends, also in matters regarding schooling and the rearing of children. The State is thus called upon to play a role in accordance with the principle mentioned above. Whenever the family is self-sufficient, it should be left to act on its own; an excessive intrusiveness on the part of the State would prove detrimental, to say nothing of lacking due respect, and would constitute an open violation of the rights of the family. Only in those situations where the family is not really self-sufficient does the State have the authority and duty to intervene.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 74.

Beyond child-rearing and schooling at all levels, State assistance, while not excluding private initiatives, can find expression in institutions such as those founded to safeguard the life and health of citizens, and in particular to provide social benefits for workers. *Unemployment* is today one of the most serious threats to family life and a rightful cause of concern to every society. It represents a challenge for the political life of individual States and an area for careful study in the Church's social doctrine. It is urgently necessary, therefore, to come up with courageous solutions capable of looking beyond the confines of one's own nation and taking into consideration the many families for whom lack of employment means living in situations of tragic poverty.<sup>42</sup>

While speaking about employment in reference to the family, it is appropriate to emphasize how important and burdensome is the *work women do within the family unit*.<sup>43</sup> *that work should be acknowledged and deeply appreciated.* The "toil" of a woman who, having given birth to a child, nourishes and cares for that child and devotes herself to its upbringing, particularly in the early years, is so great as to be comparable to any professional work. This ought to be clearly stated and upheld, no less than any other labor right. Motherhood, because of all the hard work it entails, should be recognized as giving the right to financial benefits at least equal to those of other kinds of work under taken in order to support the family during such a delicate phase of its life.

Every effort should be made so that the family will be recognized as the *primordial* and, in a certain sense "sovereign" society! The "sovereignty" of the family is essential for the good of society. A truly sovereign and spiritually vigorous nation is always made up of strong families who are aware of their vocation and mission in history. *The family is at the heart* of all these problems and tasks. To relegate it to a subordinate or secondary role, excluding it from its rightful position in society, would be to inflict grave harm on the authentic growth of society as a whole.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Encyclical Letter *Centesimus annus* (1 May 1991), n. 57; AAS 83 (1991), 862-863.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Encyclical Letter *Laborem exercens* (14 September 1981), n. 19: AAS 73 (1981), 625-629.

## II

### THE BRIDEGROOM IS WITH YOU

#### *At Cana in Galilee*

18. Engaged in conversational with John's disciples one day, Jesus speaks of a wedding invitation and the presence of the bridegroom among the guests: "the Bridegroom is with them" (Mt 9:15). In this way he indicated the fulfillment in his own person of the image of God the Bridegroom, which had already been used in the Old Testament, in order to reveal fully the mystery of God as the mystery of Love.

By describing himself as a "Bridegroom," Jesus reveals the essence of God and confirms his immense love for mankind. But the choice of this image also throws light indirectly on the profound truth of spousal love. Indeed by using this image in order to speak about God, Jesus shows to what extent the fatherhood and the love of God are reflected in the love of a man and a woman united in marriage. Hence, at the beginning of his mission, we find Jesus at *Cana in Galilee*, taking part in a wedding banquet, together with Mary and with the first disciples (cf. Jn 2:1-11). He thus wishes to make clear to *what extent the truth about the family is part of God's Revelation and the history of salvation*. In the Old Testament, and particularly in the Prophets, we find many beautiful expressions about the *love of God*. It is a gentle love like that of a mother for her child, a tender love like that of the bridegroom for his bride, but at the same time an equally and intensely jealous love. It is not in the first place a love which chastises but one which forgives; a love which deigns to meet man just as the father does in the case of the prodigal son; a love which raises him up and gives him a share in divine life. It is an amazing love: something entirely new and previously unknown to the whole pagan world.

At Cana in Galilee Jesus is, as it were, the *herald of the divine truth about marriage*, that truth on which the human family can rely, gaining reassurance amid all the trials of life. Jesus proclaims this truth by his presence at the wedding in Cana and by working his first "sign:" water changed into wine.

Jesus proclaims the truth about marriage again when, speaking to the Pharisees, he explains how the love which comes from God, a tender and spousal love, *gives rise to profound and radical demands*. Moses, by allowing a certificate of divorce to be drawn up, had been less demanding. When in their lively argument the Pharisees appealed to Moses, Jesus' answer was categorical: "from the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19:8). And he reminds them that the One who created man created him male and female, and ordained that "a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). With logical consistency Jesus concludes: "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder" (Mt 19:6). To the objection of the Pharisees who vaunt the Law of Moses he replies: "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (Mt 19:8).

Jesus appeals to "the beginning," seeing at the very origins of creation God's plan, on which the family is based, and, through the family, the entire history of humanity. What marriage is in nature becomes, by the will of Christ, a true sacrament of the New Covenant, sealed by the blood of Christ the Redeemer. *Spouses and families, remember at what price you have been "bought!"* (cf. 1 Cor 6:20)

But it is *humanly difficult* to accept and to live this marvelous truth. Should we be surprised that Moses relented before the insistent demands of his fellow Israelites, if the Apostles themselves, upon hearing the words of the Master, reply by saying: "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry" (Mt 19:10)! Nonetheless, in view of the good man and woman, of the family and the whole of society, Jesus confirms and demand which God laid down from the beginning. At the same time, however, he takes the opportunity to affirm the value of a decision not to marry for the sake of the Kingdom of God. This choice too enables one to "beget," albeit in a different way. In this choice we find the origin of the consecrated life, of the Religious Orders and Religious Congregations of East and West, and also of the discipline of priestly celibacy, as found in the tradition of the Latin Church. Hence it is untrue that "it is not expedient to marry;" however, love for the kingdom of heaven can lead a person to choose not to marry (cf. Mt 19:12).

Marriage however remains *the usual human vocation*, which is embraced by the great majority of the people of God. It is in the family

where living stones are formed for that spiritual house spoken of by the Apostle Peter (cf. 1 Pet 2:5). The bodies of the husband and wife are the dwelling-place of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 6:19). Because the transmission of divine life presumes the transmission of human life, marriage not only brings about the birth of human children, but also, through the power of Baptism, the birth of adopted children of God, who live the new life received from Christ through his Spirit.

Dear brothers and sisters, spouses and parents, this is how the *Bridegroom is with you*. You know that he is the Good Shepherd. You know who he is, and you know his voice. You know where he is leading you, and how he strives to give you pastures where you can find life and find it in abundance. You know how he withstands the marauding wolves, and is ever ready to rescue his sheep: every husband and wife, every son and daughter, every member of your families. You know that he, as the Good Shepherd, is prepared to lay down his own life for his flock (cf. Jn 10:11). He leads you by paths which are not the steep and treacherous paths of many of today's ideologies, and he repeats to today's world the fullness of truth, even as he did in his conversation with the Pharisees or when he announced it to the Apostles, who then proclaimed it to all the ends of the earth and to all the people of their day, to Jews and Greeks alike. The disciples were fully conscious that Christ had made all things new. They knew that man had been made a "new creation:" no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female, but "one" in Christ (cf. Gal 3:28) and endowed with the dignity of an adopted child of God. On the day of Pentecost man received the Spirit, the Comforter, the Spirit of truth. This was the beginning of the new People of God, the Church, the foreshadowing of new heavens and a new earth (cf. Rev 21:1).

The Apostles, overcoming their initial fears even about marriage and the family, grew in courage. They came to understand that marriage and family are a true vocation which comes from God himself and is an apostolate: the apostolate of the laity. Families are meant to contribute to the transformation of the earth and renewal of the world, of creation and of all humanity.

Dear families, you too should be fearless, ever ready to give witness to the hope that is in you (cf. 1 Pet 3:15), since the Good Shepherd has put that hope in your hearts through the Gospel. You should be ready to follow Christ towards the pastures of life, which he

himself has prepared through the Paschal Mystery of his Death and Resurrection.

*Do not be afraid of the risks!* God's strength is always far more powerful than your difficulties! Immeasurably greater than the evil at work in the world is the power of the *Sacrament of Reconciliation*, which the Fathers of the Church rightly called a "second Baptism." Much more influential than the corruption present in the world is the divine power of the *Sacrament of Confirmation*, which brings Baptism its maturity. And incomparably greater than all is the power of the Eucharist.

The *Eucharist* is truly a wondrous sacrament. In it, Christ has given us himself as food and drink, as a source of saving power. He has left himself to us that we might have life and have it in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10): the life which is in him and which he has shared with us by the gift of the Spirit in rising from the dead on the third day. The life that comes from Christ is a life for us. *It is for you, dear husbands and wives, parents and families!* Did Jesus not institute the Eucharist in a family-like setting during the Last Supper? When you meet for meals and are together in harmony, *Christ is close to you*. And he is Emmanuel, God with us, in an even greater way whenever you approach the table of the Eucharist. It can happen, as it did at Emmaus, that he is recognized only in "the breaking of the bread" (cf. Lk 24:35). It may well be that he is knocking at the door for a long time, waiting for it to be opened so that he can enter and eat with us (cf. Rev 3:20). The Last Supper and words, he spoke there contain all the power and wisdom of the sacrifice of the Cross. No other power and wisdom exist by which we can be saved and through which we can help to save others. There is no other power and no other wisdom by which you, parents, can educate both your children and yourselves. The *educational power of the Eucharist* has been proved down the generations and centuries.

Everywhere the Good Shepherd is with us. Even as he was at Cana in Galilee, the *Bridegroom in the midst of the bride and groom* as they entrusted themselves to each other for their whole life, so the Good Shepherd is also with us today as the reason for our hope, the source of strength for our hearts, the well-spring of ever new enthusiasm and the sign of the triumph of the "civilization of love." Jesus, the Good Shepherd, continues to say to us: *Do not be afraid. I*



*am with you.* “I am with you always, to the close of the age” (Mt 28:20). What is the source of this strength? What is the reason for our certainty that you are with us, even though they put you to death, O Son of God, and you died like any other human being? What is the reason for this certainty? The Evangelist says: “He loved them to the end” (Jn 13:1). Thus do you love us, you who are the First and the Last, the Living One; you who died and are alive for evermore (cf. Rev 1:17-18).

### ***The Great Mystery***

19. Saint Paul uses a concise phrase referring to family life: it is a “*great mystery*” (Eph 5:32). What he writes in the Letter to the Ephesians about that “*great mystery*,” although deeply rooted in the Book of Genesis and in the whole Old Testament tradition, nonetheless represents a new approach which will later find expression in the Church’s Magisterium.

The Church professes that Marriage, as the Sacrament of the covenant between husband and wife, is a “*great mystery*,” because it expresses *the spousal love of Christ for his Church*. Saint Paul writes: “Husbands, love your wives, a Christ 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” (Eph 5:25-26). The Apostle is speaking here about Baptism, which he discusses at length in the Letter to the Romans, where he presents it as a sharing in the death of Christ leading to a sharing in his life (cf. Rom 6:3-4). In this Sacrament the believer *is born* as a new man, for Baptism has the power to communicate new life, the very life of God. The mystery of the God-man is in some way recapitulated in the event of Baptism. As Saint Irenaeus would later say, along with many other Fathers of the Church of both East and West: “Christ Jesus, our Lord, the Son of God, became the son of man so that man could become a son of God.”<sup>44</sup>

The Bridegroom then is the very same God who became man. In the Old Covenant Yahweh appears as the Bridegroom of Israel, the chosen people - a Bridegroom who is both affectionate and demand-

<sup>44</sup> Cf. *Adversus Haereses*, III, 10, 2: PG 7, 873; SCh 211, 116-119; Saint Augustine, *De Incarnatione Verbi*, 54: PG 25, 191-192; Saint Augustine, *Sermo* 185, 3: PL 38, 999; *Sermo* 194, 3, 3: PL 38, 1016.

ing, jealous and faithful. Israel's moments of betrayal desertion and idolatry, described in such powerful and evocative terms by the Prophets, can never extinguish the love with which God - *the Bridegroom* "loves to the end" (cf. Jn 13:1).

The confirmation and fulfillment of the spousal relationship between God and his people are realized in Christ, in the New Covenant. Christ assures us that the Bridegroom is with us (cf. Mt 9:15). He is with all of us: he is with the Church. The *Church becomes a Bride*, the Bride of Christ. This Bride, of whom the Letter to the Ephesians speaks, is present in each of the baptized and is like one who presents herself before her Bridegroom. "Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her.... 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" (Eph 5:25-27). The love with which the Bridegroom "has loved" the Church "to the end" continuously renews her holiness in her saints, even though she remains a Church of sinners. Even sinners, "tax collectors and harlots," are called to holiness, as Christ himself affirms in the Gospel (cf. Mt 21:31). All are called to become a glorious Church, holy and without blemish. "Be holy," says the Lord, "for I am holy" (Lev 11:44; cf. 1 Pet 1:16).

This is the deepest significance of the "great mystery," the inner meaning of the *sacramental gift* in the Church, the most profound meaning of Baptism and the Eucharist. They are fruits of the love with which the Bridegroom has loved us to the end, a love which continually expands and lavishes on people an ever greater sharing in the supernatural life.

Saint Paul, after having said: "Husbands, love your wives" (Eph 5:25), emphatically adds: "Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the Church, because we are members of his body" (Eph 5:28-30). And he encourages spouses with the words: "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21).

This is unquestionably a new presentation of the eternal truth about marriage and the family in the right of the New Covenant. Christ has revealed this truth in the Gospel by his presence at Cana

in Galilee, by the sacrifice of the Cross and the Sacraments of his Church. Husbands and wives thus discover in Christ *the point of reference for their spousal love*. In speaking of Christ as the Bridegroom of the Church, Saint Paul uses the analogy of spousal love, referring back to the Book of Genesis: "A man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). This is the "great mystery" of that eternal love already present in creation, revealed in Christ and entrusted to the Church. "This mystery is a profound one," the Apostle repeats, "and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the Church" (Eph 5:32). The Church cannot therefore be understood as the Mystical Body of Christ, as the sign of man's Covenant with God in Christ, or as the universal sacrament of salvation, unless we keep in mind the "great mystery" involved in the creation of man as male and female and the vocation of both to conjugal love, to fatherhood and to motherhood. The "great mystery," which is the Church and humanity in Christ does not exist apart from the "great mystery" expressed in the "one flesh" (cf. Gen 2:24; Eph 5:31-32), that is, in the reality of marriage and the family.

The family itself is the great mystery of God. As the "domestic church," it is the *bride of Christ*. The universal Church, and every particular Church in her, is most immediately revealed as the bride of Christ in the "domestic church" and in its experience of love: conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, fraternal love, the love of a community of persons and of generations. Could we even imagine human love without the Bridegroom and the love with which he first loved to the end? Only if husbands and wives share in that love and in that "great mystery" can they love "to the end." Unless they share in it, they do not know "to the end" what love truly is and how radical are its demands. And this is undoubtedly very dangerous for them.

The teaching of the Letter to the Ephesians amazes us with its depth and the *authority of its ethical teaching*. Pointing to marriage, and indirectly to the family, as the "great mystery" which refers to Christ and the Church, the Apostle Paul is able to reaffirm what he had earlier said to husbands: "Let each one of you love his 'wife as himself.'" He goes on to say: "And let the wife see that she respects her husband" (Eph 5:33). Respect, because she loves and known that she is loved in return. It is because of this love that husband and wife *become a mutual gift*. Love contains the acknowledgment of the personal dignity of the other, and of his or her absolute uniqueness.

Indeed, each of the spouses, as a human being, has been willed by God from among all the creatures of the earth for his or her own sake.<sup>45</sup> Each of them, however, by a conscious and responsible act, makes a free gift of self to the other and to the children received from the Lord. It is significant that Saint Paul continues his exhortation by echoing the fourth commandment: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honour your father and mother' (this is the first commandment with a promise), 'that it may be well with you and that you may live long on the earth.' Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:1-4). The Apostle thus sees in the fourth commandment the implicit commitment of mutual respect between husband and wife, between parents and children, and he recognizes in it the *principle of family stability*.

Saint Paul's magnificent synthesis concerning "great mystery" appears as the compendium or *summa* in some sense, of the teaching about God and man which was brought to fulfillment by Christ. Unfortunately, Western thought, with the development of *modern rationalism*, has been gradually moving away from this teaching. The philosopher who formulated the principle of "*Cogito, ergo sum*," "I think, therefore I am," also gave the modern concept of man its distinctive dualistic character. It is typical of rationalism to make a radical contrast in man between spirit and body, between body and spirit. But man is a person in the unity of his body and his spirit.<sup>46</sup> The body can never be reduced to mere matter: it is a *spiritualized body*, just as man's spirit is so closely united to the body that he can be described as *an embodied spirit*. The richest source for knowledge of the body is the Word made flesh. *Christ reveals man to himself*.<sup>47</sup> In a certain sense this statement of the Second Vatican Council is the reply, so long awaited, which the Church has given to modern rationalism.

This reply is of fundamental importance for understanding the family, especially against the background of today's civilization,

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et spes*, n. 24.

<sup>46</sup> "Corpore et anima unus," as the Council so clearly and felicitously stated: *ibid.*, n. 14.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, n. 22.

which, as has been said, seems in so many cases to have given up the attempt to be a "civilization of love." The modern age has made great progress in understanding both the material world and human psychology, but with regard to his deepest, metaphysical dimension contemporary man remains to a great extent a *being unknown* to himself. Consequently the family too remains *an unknown reality*. Such is the result of estrangement from that "great mystery" spoken of by the Apostle.

The separation of spirit and body in man has led to a growing tendency to consider the human body, not in accordance with the categories of its specific likeness to God, but rather on the basis of its similarity to all the other bodies present in the world of nature, bodies which man uses as raw material in his efforts to produce goods for consumption. But everyone can immediately realize what enormous dangers lurk behind the application of such criteria to man. When the human body, considered apart from spirit and thought, comes to be used as *raw material* in the same way that the bodies of animals are used - and this actually occurs for example in experimentation on embryos and fetuses - we will inevitably arrive at a dreadful ethical defeat.

Within a similar anthropological perspective, the human family is facing the challenge of a *new Manichaeism*, in which body and spirit are put in radical opposition; the body does not receive life from the spirit, and the spirit does not give life to the body. Man thus *ceases to live as a person and a subject*. Regardless of all intentions and declarations to the contrary, he becomes merely an *object*. This neo-Manichaean culture has led, for example, to human sexuality being regarded more as an area *for manipulation and exploitation* than as the basis of that *primordial wonder* which led Adam on the morning of creation to exclaim before Eve: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (Gen 2:23). This same wonder is echoed in the words of the Song of Solomon: "You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride, you have ravished my heart with a glance of your eyes" (Song 4:9). How far removed are some modern ideas from the profound understanding of masculinity and femininity found in Divine Revelation! Revelation leads us to discover in *human sexuality a treasure proper to the person*, who finds true fulfillment in the family but who can likewise express his profound calling in virginity and in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

Modern rationalism *does not tolerate mystery*. It does not accept the mystery of man as male and female, nor is it willing to admit that the full truth about man has been revealed in Jesus Christ. In particular, it does not accept the "great mystery" proclaimed in the Letter to the Ephesians, but radically opposes it. It may well acknowledge, in the context of a vague deism, the possibility and even the need for a supreme or divine Being, but it firmly rejects the idea of a God who became man in order to save man. For rationalism it is unthinkable that God should be the Redeemer, much less *that he should be "the Bride groom,"* the primordial and unique source of the human love between spouses. Rationalism provides a radically different way of looking at creation and the meaning of human existence. But once man begins to lose sight of a God who loves him, a God who calls man through Christ to live in him and with him, and once the family no longer has the possibility of sharing in the "great mystery," what is left except the mere *temporal dimension of life*? Earthly life becomes nothing more than the scenario of a battle for existence, of a desperate search for gain, and financial gain before all else.

The deep-seated roots of the "great mystery," the sacrament of love and life which began with Creation and Redemption and which *has Christ the Bridegroom as its ultimate surety*, have been lost in the modern way of looking at things. The "great mystery" is threatened in us and all around us. May the Church's celebration of the Year of the Family be a fruitful opportunity for husbands and wives to rediscover that mystery and recommit themselves to it with strength, courage and enthusiasm.

### ***Mother of Fairest Love***

20. The history of "fairest love" begins at the Annunciation, in those wondrous words which the angel spoke to Mary, called to become the Mother of the Son of God. With Mary's "yes," the One who is "God from God and light from light" becomes a son of man. Mary is his Mother, while continuing to be the Virgin who "knows not man" (cf. Lk 1:34). As Mother and Virgin, Mary becomes the *Mother of Fairest Love*. This truth is already revealed in the words of the Archangel Gabriel, but its full significance will gradually become clearer and more evident as Mary follows her Son in the pilgrimage of faith.<sup>48</sup>

The "Mother of Fairest Love" was accepted by the one who, according to Israel's tradition, was already her earthly husband: *Joseph, of the house of David*. Joseph would have had the right to consider his promised bride as his wife and the mother of his children. But God takes it upon himself to intervene in this spousal covenant: "Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit" (Mt 1:20). Joseph is aware, having seen it with his own eyes, that a new life with which he has had nothing to do has been conceived in Mary. Being a just man, and observing the Old Law, which in his situation imposed the obligation of divorce, he wishes to dissolve his marriage in a loving way (cf. Mt 1:19). The angel of the Lord tells him that this would not be consistent with his vocation; indeed it would be contrary to the spousal love uniting him to Mary. This mutual spousal love, to be completely "fairest love," requires that he should take Mary and her Son into his own house in Nazareth. Joseph obeys the divine message and does all that he had been commanded (cf. Mt 1:24). And so, thanks also to Joseph, the *mystery of the Incarnation* and, together with it, the *mystery of the Holy Family, come to be profoundly inscribed in the spousal love of husband and wife* and, in an indirect way, in the genealogy of every human family. What Saint Paul will call the "great mystery" found its most lofty expression in the Holy Family. Thus the *family truly takes its place at the very heart of the New Covenant*.

It can also be said that the history of "fairest love" began, in a certain way, with the *first human couple*: Adam and Eve. The temptation to which they yielded and the original sin which resulted did not completely deprive them of the capacity for "fairest love." This becomes clear when we read, for example, in the Book of Tobit that the spouses Tobias and Sarah, in defining the meaning of their union, appealed to their first parents, Adam and Eve (cf. Tob 8:6). In the New Covenant, Saint Paul also bears witness to this, speaking of Christ as a new Adam (cf. 1 Cor 15:45). Christ does not come to condemn the first Adam and the first Eve, but to save them. He comes to renew everything that is God's gift in man, everything in him that is eternally good and beautiful, everything that forms the basis of

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, nn. 56-59.

**"fairest love."** The *history of "fairest love"* is, in one sense, the *history of man's salvation*.

"Fairest love" always *begins with the self-revelation of the person*. At creation Eve reveals herself to Adam, just as Adam reveals himself to Eve. In the course of history newly-married couples tell each other: "We shall walk the path of life together." The family thus begins as a union of the two and, through the Sacrament, as a new community in Christ. *For love to be truly "fairest," it must be a gift of God*, grafted by the Holy Spirit on to human hearts and continually nourished in them (cf. Rom 5:5). Fully conscious of this, the Church in the Sacrament of Marriage asks the Holy Spirit to visit human hearts. If love is truly to be "fairest love," a gift of one person to another, it must come from the One who is himself a gift and the source of every gift.

Such was the case, as the Gospel recounts, with Mary and Joseph who, at the threshold of the New Covenant, renewed the experience of "fairest love" described in the Song of Solomon. Joseph thinks of Mary in the words: "My sister, my bride" (Song 4:9). Mary, the Mother of God, conceives by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the origin of the "fairest love," which the Gospel delicately places in the context of the "great mystery."

When we speak about "fairest love," we are also speaking about *beauty*: the beauty of love and the beauty of the human being who, by the power of the Holy Spirit, is capable of such love. We are speaking of the beauty of man and woman: their beauty as brother or sister, as a couple about to be married, as husband and wife. The Gospel sheds light not only on the mystery of "fairest love," but also on the equally profound mystery of beauty, which, like love, is from God. Man and woman are from God, two persons called to become a mutual gift. From the primordial gift of the Spirit, the "giver of life," there arises the reciprocal gift of being husband or wife, no less than that of being brother or sister.

All this is confirmed by the mystery of the Incarnation, a mystery which has been *the source of a new beauty* in the history of humanity and has inspired countless masterpieces of art. After the strict prohibition against portraying the invisible God by graven images (cf. Dt 4:15-20), the Christian era began instead to portray in



art the God who became man, Mary his Mother, Saint Joseph, the Saints of the Old and New Covenant and the entire created world redeemed by Christ. In this way it began a new relationship with the world of culture and of art. It can be said that this *new artistic canon*, attentive to the deepest dimension of man and his future, originates in the mystery of Christ's Incarnation and draws inspiration from the mysteries of his life: his birth in Bethlehem, his hidden life in Nazareth, his public ministry, Golgotha, the Resurrection and his final return in glory. The Church is conscious that her presence in the contemporary world, and in particular the contribution and support she offers to the promotion of the dignity of marriage and the family, are intimately linked to the development of culture, and she is rightly concerned for this. This is precisely why the Church is so concerned with the direction taken by the means of social communication, which have the duty of *forming* as well as *informing* their vast audience.<sup>49</sup> Knowing the vast and powerful impact of the media, she never tires of reminding communications workers of the dangers arising from the manipulation of truth. Indeed, what truth can there be in films, shows and radio and television programmes dominated by pornography and violence? Do these really serve the *truth about man*? Such questions are unavoidable for those who work in the field of communications and those who have responsibility for creating and marketing media products.

This kind of critical reflection should lead our society, which certainly contains many positive aspects on the material and cultural level, to realize that, from various points of view, it is a *society which is sick and* is creating profound distortions in man. Why is this happening? The reason is that our society has broken away from the full truth about man, from the truth about what man and woman really are as persons. Thus it cannot adequately comprehend the real meaning of the gift of persons in marriage, responsible love at the service of fatherhood and motherhood, and the true grandeur of procreation and education. Is it an exaggeration to say that the *mass media*, if they are not guided by sound ethical principles, fail to serve the truth in its fundamental dimension? This is the real drama: the modern means of social communication are tempted to manipulate the message, *thereby falsifying the truth about man*. Human beings

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Aelatis novae* (22 February 1992), n. 7.

are not the same thing as the images proposed in advertising and shown by the modern mass media. *They are much more*, in their physical and psychic unity, as composites of soul and body, as persons. They are much more because of their vocation to love, which introduces them as male and female into the realm of the "great mystery."

Mary was the first to enter this realm, and she introduced her husband Joseph into it. Thus they became *the first models* of that "fairest love" which the Church continually implores for young people, husbands and wives and families. Young people, spouses and families themselves should never cease to pray for this. How can we not think about the crowds of pilgrims, old and young, who visit Marian shrines and gaze upon the face of the Mother of God, on the faces of the Holy Family, where they find reflected the full beauty of the love which God has given to mankind?

In the Sermon on the Mount, recalling the sixth commandment, Christ proclaims: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that every one who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mt 5:27-28). With regard to the Decalogue and its purpose of defending the traditional solidity of marriage and the family, these words represent a great step forward. Jesus goes to the very source of the sin of adultery, which dwells in the innermost heart of man and is revealed in a way of looking and thinking dominated by *concupiscence*. Through *concupiscence man tends to treat as his own possession another human being*, one who does not belong to him but to God. In speaking to his contemporaries, Christ is also speaking to men and women in every age and generation. He is speaking in particular to our own generation, living as it is in a society marked by consumerism and hedonism.

Why does Christ speak out in so forceful and demanding a way in the Sermon on the Mount? The reason is quite clear: Christ wants to safeguard *the holiness of marriage and of the family*. He wants to defend the full truth about the human person and his dignity.

Only in the light of this truth can the family be "to the end" the great "revelation," *the first discovery of the other*: the mutual discovery of husband and wife and then of each son and daughter born to

them. All that a husband and a wife promise to each other - to be "true in good times and in bad, and to love and honour each other all the days of their life" - is possible only when "fairest love" is present. Man today cannot learn this from what modern mass culture has to say. "Fairest love" is teamed above all in prayer. *Prayer*, in fact, always brings with it, to use an expression of Saint Paul, a type of *interior hiddenness with Christ in God*; "*your life is hid with Christ in God*" (Col 3:3). Only in this hiddenness do we see the workings of the Holy Spirit, the source of "fairest love." He has poured forth this love not only in the hearts of Mary and Joseph but also in the hearts of all married couples who are open to hearing the word of God and keeping it (cf. Lk 8:15). The future of each family unit depends upon this "fairest love:" the mutual love of husband and wife, of parents and children, a love embracing all generations. Love is the true *source of the unity and strength of the family*.

### ***Birth and Danger***

21. It is significant that the brief account of the infancy of Jesus mentions, practically at the same time, his *birth* and the *danger* which he immediately had to confront. Luke records the prophetic words uttered by the aged Simeon when the Child was presented to the Lord in the Temple forty days after his birth. Simeon speaks of "light" and of a "sign of contradiction." He goes on to predict of Mary: "And a sword will pierce through your own soul also" (cf. Lk 2:32-35). Matthew, for his part, tells of the plot of Herod against Jesus. Informed by the Magi who came from the East to see the new king who was to be born (cf. Mt 2:2), Herod senses a threat to his power, and after their departure he orders the death of all male children aged two years or under in Bethlehem and the surrounding towns. Jesus escapes from the hands of Herod thanks to a special divine intervention and the fatherly care of Joseph, who takes him with his mother into Egypt, where they remain until Herod's death. The Holy Family then returns to Nazareth, their home town, and begins what for many years would be a hidden life, marked by the carrying out of daily tasks with fidelity and generosity (cf. Mt 2:1-23; Lk 2:39-52).

The fact that Jesus, from his very birth, had to face threats and dangers has a certain *prophetic eloquence*. Even as a Child, Jesus is a "sign of contradiction." Prophetically eloquent also is the tragedy of

the innocent children of Bethlehem, slaughtered at Herod's command.<sup>50</sup> According to the Church's ancient liturgy, they shared in the birth and saving passion of Christ. Through their own "passion," they complete "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church" (Col 1:24).

In the infancy Gospel, *the proclamation of life*, which comes about in a wondrous way in the birth of the Redeemer, is thus put in sharp contrast with the *threat to life*, a life which embraces the mystery of the Incarnation and of the divine-human reality of Christ in its entirety. The Word was made flesh (cf. Jn 1:14): God became man. The Fathers of the Church frequently call attention to this sublime mystery: "God became man, so that we might become gods."<sup>51</sup> This truth of faith is likewise the truth about the human being. It clearly indicates the gravity of all attempts on the life of a child in the womb of its mother. Precisely in this situation we encounter *everything which is diametrically opposed* to "fairest love." If an individual is exclusively concerned with "use," he can reach the point of killing love by killing the fruit of love. For the culture of use, the "blessed fruit of your womb" (Lk 1:42) becomes in a certain sense an "accursed fruit."

How can we not recall, in this regard, the aberrations that the so-called *constitutional State* has tolerated in so many countries? The law of God is univocal and categorical with respect to human life. God commands: "You shall not kill" (Ex 20:13). *No human lawgiver can therefore assert: it is permissible for you to kill, you have the right to kill, or you should kill.* Tragically, in the history of our century, this has actually occurred when certain political forces have come to power, even by democratic means, and have passed laws contrary to the right to life of every human being, in the name of eugenic, ethnic or other reasons, as unfounded as they are mistaken. A no less serious phenomenon, also because it meets with widespread acquiescence or consensus in public opinion, is that of laws which fail to respect the right to life from the moment of conception. How can one morally

<sup>50</sup> In the liturgy of their Feast, which has its origins in the fifth century, the Church turns to the Holy Innocents, invoking them with the words of the poet Prudentius (+ c. 405) as "the flowers of the martyrs whom, at the very threshold of their lives, the persecutor of Christ cut down as the whirlwind does to roses still in bud."

<sup>51</sup> Saint Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi*, 54: PG 25, 191-192.

accept laws that permit the killing of a human being not yet born, but already alive in the mother's womb? The right to life becomes an exclusive prerogative of adults who even manipulate legislatures in order to carry out their own plans and pursue their own interests.

We are facing an immense threat to life: not only to the life of individuals but also to that of civilization itself. The statement that civilization has become, in some areas, a "civilization of death" is being confirmed in disturbing ways. Was it not a *prophetic event* that the birth of Christ was accompanied by danger to his life? Yes, even the life of the One who is at the same time Son of Man and Son of God was threatened. It was endangered from the very beginning, and only by a miracle did he escape death.

Nevertheless, in the last few decades some consoling signs of a *reawakening of conscience* have appeared: both among intellectuals and in public opinion itself. There is a new and growing sense of respect for life from the first moment of conception, especially among young people. "Pro-life" movements are beginning to spread. This is a leaven of hope for the future of the family and of all humanity.

### ***"You welcomed me"***

22. Married couples and families of all the world: *the Bridegroom is with you!* This is what the Pope wishes to say to you above all else during this Year which the United Nations and the Church have dedicated to the family. "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent his Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:16-17). "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.... You must be born anew" (Jn 3:6-7). You must be born "of water and the Spirit" (Jn 3:5). You yourselves, dear fathers and mothers, are the *first witnesses and servants of this rebirth* in the Holy Spirit. As you beget children on earth, never forget that *you are also begetting them for God*. God wants their birth in the Holy Spirit. He wants them to be adopted children in the Only begotten Son, who gives us "power to become children of God" (Jn 1:12). The work of salvation continues in the world and is carried out through the Church. All this is the work of the Son of God, the Divine Bridegroom, who has given to us the Kingdom of his Father and who reminds us,

his disciples, that "the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Lk 17:21).

Our faith tells us that Jesus Christ, who "is seated at the right hand of the Father," will come to judge the living and the dead. On the other hand, the Gospel of John assures us that Christ was sent "into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (Jn 3:17). In what then does judgment consist? Christ himself gives the answer: "And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world... But he who does what is true comes into the light, that it may be clearly seen that his deeds have been wrought by God" (Jn 3:19, 21). Recently, the Encyclical *Veritatis splendor* also reminded us of this.<sup>52</sup> Is Christ then a judge? *Your own actions will judge you in the light of the truth which you know.* Fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, will be judged by their actions. Each one of us will be judged according to the Commandments, including those we have discussed in this Letter: the Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Ninth Commandments. But ultimately everyone will be judged *on love*, which is the deepest meaning and the summing-up of the Commandments. As Saint John of the Cross wrote: "In the evening of life we shall be judged on love."<sup>53</sup> Christ, the Redeemer and Bridegroom of mankind, "was born for this and came into the world for this, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of truth hears his voice" (cf. Jn 18:37). Christ will be the judge, but in the way that he himself indicated in speaking of the Last Judgment (cf. Mt 25:31-46). His will be a *judgment on love*, a judgment which will definitively confirm the truth that the Bridegroom was with us, without perhaps our having been aware of it.

The judge is the *Bridegroom of the Church and of humanity*. This is why he says, in passing his sentence: "Come, O blessed of my Father... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me" (Mt 25:34-36). This list could of course be lengthened, and countless other problems relevant to married and family life could be added. There we might very well find statements like: "I was an unborn child, and you welcomed me by letting me be

<sup>52</sup> Cf. *Veritatis splendor* (6 August 1993), n. 84.

<sup>53</sup> *Words of Light and Love*, n. 59.

born;" "I was an abandoned child and you became my family;" "I was an orphan, and you adopted me and raised me as one of your own children." Or again: "You helped mothers filled with uncertainty and exposed to wrongful pressure to welcome their unborn child and let it be born;" and "You helped large families and families in difficulty to look after and educate the children God gave them." We could continue with a long and detailed list, including all those kinds of true moral and human good in which love is expressed. This is *the great harvest* which the Redeemer of the world, to whom the Father has entrusted judgment, will come to reap. It is *the harvest of grace and of good works*, ripened by the breath of the Bridegroom in the Holy Spirit, who is ever at work in the world and in the Church. For all of this, let us give thanks to the Giver of every good gift.

We also know however that according to the Gospel of Matthew the Final Judgment will contain another list, solemn and terrifying: "Depart from me... for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me" (Mt 25:41-43). To this list also we could add other ways of acting, in which Jesus is present in each case as the *one who has been rejected*. In this way he would identify with the abandoned wife or husband, or with the child conceived and then rejected: "You did not welcome me!" This judgment is also to be found throughout the history of our families; it is to be found throughout the history of our nations and all humanity. Christ's words, "You did not welcome me," also touch social institutions, governments and international organizations.

Pascal wrote that "Jesus will be in agony until the end of the world."<sup>64</sup> The agony of Gethsemane and the agony of Golgotha are *the summit of the revelation of love*. Both scenes reveal the Bridegroom who is with us, who loves us ever anew, and "loves us to the end" (cf. Jn 13:1). The love which is in Christ, and which from him flows beyond the limits of individual or family histories, flows beyond the limits of all human history.

At the end of these reflections, dear brothers and sisters, in view of what will be proclaimed from various platforms during the Year of the Family, I would like to renew with you the profession of faith

<sup>64</sup> B. Pascal, *Pensees, Le mystère de Jesus*, 553 (ed. Br.).

which Peter addressed to Christ: "You have the words of eternal life" (Jn 6:68). Together let us say: "Your words, O Lord, will not pass away!" (cf. Mk 13:31). What then is the Pope's wish for you at the end of this lengthy *meditation on the Year of the Family*? It is his prayer that all of you will be in agreement with these words, which are "spirit and life" (Jn 6:63).

### ***"Strengthened in the inner man"***

23. I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every fatherhood and motherhood is named, "that he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph 3:16). I willingly return to these words of the Apostle, which I mentioned in the first part of this Letter. In a certain sense they are pivotal words. *The family, fatherhood and motherhood all go together*. The family is the first human setting in which is formed that "inner man" of which the Apostle speaks. The growth of the inner man in strength and vigour is a gift of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit.

The Year of the Family sets before us in the Church an immense task, no different from the task which families face every year and every day. In the context of this Year, however, that task takes on particular meaning and importance. We began the Year of the Family in Nazareth on the *Solemnity of the Holy Family*. Throughout this Year we wish to make our pilgrim way towards that place of grace which has become the *Shrine of the Holy Family* in the history of humanity. We want to make this pilgrimage in order to become aware once again of that heritage of truth about the family which from the beginning has been *a treasure for the Church*. It is a treasure which grows out of the rich tradition of the Old Covenant, is completed in the New and finds its fullest symbolic expression in the mystery of the Holy Family in which the divine Bridegroom brings about the redemption of all families. From there Jesus proclaims the "*gospel of the family*." All generations of Christ's disciples have drawn upon this treasure of truth, beginning with the Apostles, on whose teaching we have so frequently drawn in this Letter.

In our own times this treasure has been examined in depth in the documents of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>55</sup> Perceptive analyses



were developed in the many addresses given by Pope Pius XII to newly weds,<sup>56</sup> in the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* of Pope Paul VI, in the speeches delivered at the Synod of Bishops on the Family (1980) and in the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*. I have already spoken of these statements of the Magisterium. If I return to them now, it is in order to emphasize how vast and rich is *the treasure of Christian truth about the family*. Written testimonies alone, however, will not suffice. Much more important are *living testimonies*. As Pope Paul VI observed, "contemporary man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he listens to teachers it is because they are witnesses."<sup>57</sup> In the Church, the treasure of the family has been entrusted first and foremost to witnesses: to those fathers and mothers, sons and daughters who through the family have discovered the path of their human and Christian vocation, the dimension of the "inner man" (Eph 3:16) of which the Apostle speaks, and thus have attained holiness. *The Holy Family is the beginning of countless other holy families*. The Council recalled that holiness is the vocation of all the baptized.<sup>58</sup> In our age, as in the past, there is no lack of witnesses to the "gospel of the family," even if they are not well known or have not been proclaimed saints by the Church. The Year of the Family is the appropriate occasion to bring about an increased awareness of their existence and their great number.

The history of mankind, the history of salvation, passes by way of the family. In these pages I have tried to show how the family is placed at the centre of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love. To the family is entrusted the task of striving, first and foremost, *to unleash the forces of good*, the source of which is found in Christ the Redeemer of man. *Every family unit needs to make these forces their own so that*, to use a phrase spoken on the occasion of the Millennium

<sup>56</sup> Cf. in particular Pastoral Constitution on the Church *Gaudium et spes*, nn. 47-52.

<sup>56</sup> Of particular interest is the Address to those taking part in the Convention of the Italian Catholic Union of Midwives (29 October 1951), in *Discorsi e Radiomessaggi*, XIII, 333-353.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Address to the members of the "Consilium de Laicis" (2 October 1974) in AAS 76 (1974), 568.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, n. 40.

of Christianity in Poland, the family will be "*strong with the strength of God*."<sup>59</sup> This is why the present Letter has sought to draw inspiration from the apostolic exhortations found in the writings of Paul (cf. 1 Cor 7:1-40; Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:25) and the Letters of Peter and John (cf. 1 Pet 3:1-7; 1 Jn 2:12-17). Despite the differences in their historical and cultural contexts, how similar are the experiences of Christians and families then and now!

What I offer, then, is *an invitation*: an invitation addressed especially to you, dearly beloved husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters. It is an invitation to all the particular Churches to remain united in the teaching of the apostolic truth. It is addressed to my Brothers in the Episcopate, and to priests, religious families and consecrated persons, to movements and associations of the lay faithful; to our brothers and sisters united by common faith in Jesus Christ, even while not yet sharing the full communion willed by the Saviour;<sup>60</sup> to all who by sharing in the faith of Abraham belong, like us, to the great community of believers in the one God;<sup>61</sup> to those who are the heirs of other spiritual and religious traditions; and to all men and women of good will.

May Christ, who is the same "yesterday and today and for ever" (Heb 13:8), be with us as we bow the knee before the Father, from whom all fatherhood and motherhood and every human family is named (cf. Eph 3:14-15). In the words of the prayer to the Father which Christ himself taught us, may he once again offer testimony of that love with which he loved us "to the end!" (Jn 13:1).

I speak with the power of his truth to all people of our day, so that they will come to appreciate the grandeur of the goods of marriage, family and life; so that they will come to appreciate the great danger which follows when these realities are not respected, or when the supreme values which lie at the foundation of the family and of human dignity are disregarded.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, *Rodzina Bogiem silna*, Homily delivered at Jasna Góra (26 August 1961).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, n. 15.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, n. 16.

May the Lord Jesus repeat these truths to us *with the power and the wisdom of the Cross*, so that humanity will not yield to the temptation of the "father of lies" (Jn 8:44), who constantly seeks to draw people to broad and easy ways, ways apparently smooth and pleasant, but in reality full of snares and dangers. May we always be enabled to follow the One who is "the way, and the truth, and the life" (Jn 14:6).

Dear brothers and sisters: Let all of this be the task of Christian families and the object of the Church's missionary concern throughout this Year, so rich in singular divine graces. May the Holy Family, icon and model of every human family, help each individual to walk in the spirit of Nazareth. May it help each family unit to grow in understanding of its particular mission in society and the Church by hearing the Word of God, by prayer and by a fraternal sharing of life. May Mary, Mother of "Fairest Love," and Joseph, Guardian of the Redeemer, accompany us all with their constant protection.

With these sentiments I bless every family in the name of the Most Holy Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 2 February, the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, in the year 1994, the sixteenth of my Pontificate.

## **The Preparation of Seminary Educators**

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*Congregation for Catholic Education  
(of Seminaries and Institutes of Study)*

### **DIRECTIVES CONCERNING THE PREPARATION OF SEMINARY EDUCATORS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

1. Among the various means, pointed out by the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II in the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, for promoting pedagogical style in seminaries, the specific preparation of seminary educators holds first place. In fact, seminary educators occupy the key position that determines the spirit and efficacy of the work of formation. The Bishops, therefore, as those primarily responsible for the progress of the seminaries, "first of all should feel their grave responsibility for the formation of those who have been given the task of educating future priests."<sup>1</sup>

Having considered the particular demands of this responsibility and its importance in the present circumstances, the Congregation for Catholic Education has thought it appropriate to invite the responsible ecclesiastical authorities to reflect on the present "Directives" and, in accord with local needs, to make decisions with regard to them.

2. The problem that the Congregation wishes to bring to their attention is certainly not new. It was already noted in the Second Vatican Council, and is felt strongly throughout the whole Church.

<sup>1</sup> PDV, n. 66.

The decree *Optatam Totius* requires that educators in seminaries be prepared "in sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience and special training in spirituality and teaching methods. To provide this training, special colleges should be established, or at least suitable courses should be organized, as well as regular meetings of seminary directors."<sup>2</sup>

3. The conciliar requirements had been further underlined by some recommendations of the extraordinary Synod of Bishops of 1967, then synthesized in n. 30 of the *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis*: "The task of seminary Superiors is the most excellent of all arts, one which cannot tolerate an off-hand or chance mode of action. Of necessity, therefore, besides natural and supernatural gifts, they must have, as each one's duty demands, due spiritual, pedagogical or technical training, which they would best have acquired in special Institutions founded, or to be founded, for this purpose in their own or in other regions." For the fulfillment of such initiatives, they were invited to seek the collaboration of Congregations and priestly Societies specialized in the direction of seminaries, and of special "technical commissions" of experts to be formed in individual nations.

4. Today, more than 25 years after the Second Vatican Council and the first postconciliar provisions, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* treats the topic in the light of worldwide experiences referred to in numerous interventions of the Synod Fathers. Moved by a lively concern for the strengthening of the pedagogical efficacy of the seminaries, they re-emphasized the conciliar requirements, putting a strong accent on the collegial, ecclesial and spiritual profile of the educators: "The task of formation of candidates for the priesthood requires not only a certain special preparation of those to whom this work is entrusted, one that is professional, pedagogical, spiritual, human and theological, but also a spirit of communion and of cooperating together to carry out the program, so that the unity of the pastoral action of the Seminary is always maintained under the leadership of the rector. The body of formation personnel should witness to a truly evangelical life-style and total dedication to the Lord. It should enjoy a certain stability, and its members as a rule should live in the Seminary

<sup>2</sup> N. 5.

community. They should be intimately joined to the Bishop, who is the first one responsible for the formation of the priests."<sup>3</sup>

5. In the present document, the Congregation for Catholic Education, with the intention of recalling the various experiences and provisions of the past, and of bringing them up to date according to the suggestions of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, offers Bishops and their collaborators in priestly formation, some indications that can be useful as criteria for the evaluation of both past and current initiatives, and as guidelines for planning for the immediate future.

To achieve this, first some characteristics of the present situation of the educators of the clergy and of their formation will be seen (I), then an examination of the principal responsibilities in this field (II), some proposals of criteria for seminary educators (III) and some indications regarding their formation (IV). In conclusion, some concrete indications will be presented which can help render operative and effective the Church's concern for this important ministry (V).

## I

### ASPECTS OF THE PRESENT SITUATION

An examination of the present situation is necessary in order to become aware of the real necessities in this field, characterized by the scarcity of educators, the increased demands of the educational task, and by various initiatives and experiences that have been recorded in different countries during the last decades.

#### 1. Scarcity of seminary educators

6. First of all, one notes the great disproportion between the availability of directing and teaching personnel and the real needs of the seminaries.

There are some satisfying and positive situations in the Church, above all in dioceses and nations that, thanks to sound spiritual traditions and to a prudent conciliar reform, have been able to create

<sup>3</sup> PDV, n. 66.

and maintain active Christian communities, animated by a missionary spirit and by the ideal of the priestly vocation. They provide for their own needs and are often able to assist other areas which are in need. Nevertheless, in view of the overall situation, such conditions are, unfortunately, rare.

7. The scarcity of educators is experienced even in countries with ancient Christian traditions. Following the crisis of past years, the ranks of diocesan and religious clergy have thinned, and the average age has greatly increased, while at the same time the complexity of new pastoral responsibilities requires in stead an increase of shepherds of souls. A very grave situation presents itself in particular in the countries of the ex-communist block of central and eastern Europe where, for many reasons, it is not easy to find suitable priests to serve in the seminaries; and when they are found, they cannot always be transferred from their ministries, because they are considered indispensable to them.

8. Also in a delicate situation are dioceses — above all, in mission territories and in Latin America — that are registering a noticeable increase in candidates for the priesthood. They aspire to organize their own seminaries, for which, however, it is not easy for them to find a sufficient number of adequately prepared educators. The improvisations and makeshift solutions, upon which at times they rely, turn out to be problematic, and insufficient to guarantee a good level of spiritual, intellectual and pastoral formation for the future clergy.

9. In order to overcome such difficulties, some dioceses have received, and in various cases continue to receive, generous help from religious institutes. However, this collaboration is diminishing, as a result of the vocational difficulties of the institutes themselves. In not a few cases, the religious have had to reduce their service to the seminaries, or even suspend it, due to the lack of personnel prepared for such responsibilities of formation.

## **2. The need for pedagogical renewal**

10. The complexity of the situation in which the seminaries find themselves is confirmed in the detailed analysis of the spiritual

conditions of the world and of the Church of today found in the first chapter of *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. The responsibilities of seminary formation have become more difficult, and for that same reason the criteria for the selection of educators are very demanding. The need to promote a more dynamic active pedagogy, open to the realities of life and attentive to the process of personal growth, which is ever more differentiated and complex, demand gifts of proven solidity, to a degree almost unknown the past. Furthermore, to be an educator today call for a constant effort to keep up to date, above all the field of one's specific competence. It also require the capacity to follow the whole formation process assiduously and attentively, constantly aware of the spiritual needs of the community and of every individual. This conies a constant and absorbing person commitment, which presupposes the necessary psychological and physical capacity of the candidates proposed for the work of formation.

11. Another circumstances brought to light by the Apostolic Exhortation that can at times render more difficult the selection of ideal formation personnel is the need to have priests available who are animated by the spirit of communion and collaboration, possess "a knowledge of how to work in groups."<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the selection and formation of individual educators, even those personally very gifted, is insufficient, if they are not capable of constituting a true and proper "teaching team," whose members are unite in spirit and collaborate fraternally. For this reason is necessary to choose candidates who seek authentic priestly ideals, correct spirituality and doctrine, an who know how to commit themselves in a common project of formation. Experience shows that without true team work, it is impossible to make the seminary function well. This constitutes, on the one hand, the promise of real progress in the work of formation but on the other hand, increases the difficulty of finding priests who are apt for this type of activity.

### **3. Initiatives and experience in action**

12. The prior or initial preparation of educators has been attempted only in those dioceses and nations where a certain avail-

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.



ability of vocations and priests allows a good selection of formation personnel in relation to the needs of their respective seminaries.

But even in these cases, and still more so in all the other situations, more weight is given to the "charism" and to the personal gifts of the candidates than to the need for a specific preparation and for specialized studies. Generally, one is content with a solid theological and spiritual formation and a good psychological equilibrium, trusting in the formation to be acquired successively through teaching experience and attendance at meetings and encounters.

The idea of special institutes for the educators of the clergy has consequently not yet found a sufficiently ample realization. Therefore an analytical reflection on current experimentation is not yet possible.

13. The practice of holding periodical meetings and courses of short and medium duration with the goal of bringing the educators up to date is more widely diffused. In general, these have been seen to be very useful, above all when they take place in a serene and serious spiritual atmosphere, under the guidance of Bishops and in demanding and structured programs. A more careful evaluation however is required in the case of initiatives proposed by very "specialized" person groups, above all in the field of psychology. These are valid to the extent that they express a pedagogical position rooted in evangelical values and in the ecclesial orientation appropriate to candidates for the priesthood, but they are less fruitful, and even at times a source of disorientation when they do not fully satisfy this condition because of unilateral and questionable methods and content.

Regarding this, it should be emphasized that the *Magisterium* of the Pope, the document of the Holy See, and the *Ration Institutionis Sacerdotalis* of the national Episcopal Conferences approved by the competent Roman offices, remain an indispensable reference point and criterion of inspiration.

14. In various cases the assistance of "technical commissions," which take their concrete form and name according to the local circumstances and traditions, is employed and duly appreciated, above all in those places where their composition is balanced, their

members animated by an authentic ecclesial spirit and where they avoid the risk of assuming inappropriate responsibility for the running of seminaries and for vocational discernment.

It has not yet been possible to form such commissions in nations with a small number of dioceses, where the organizational demands in this respect not so great.

The contribution of religious congregation and of priestly societies institutionally linked to the formation of the clergy has proved very valuable. They show a praiseworthy availability and spirit of initiative in this area.

15. The scientific and didactic updating of formation personnel is often promoted with a certain assiduousness by associations that exist in the diverse theological and philosophical disciplines. Their annual congresses and weeks of study, already routine especially in large nations, are normally planned and directed by professors of the large ecclesiastical Faculties, in collaboration with the episcopal commissions for priestly formation or for the doctrine of the faith. The experiences of the past few years have shown that such cooperation and understanding are increasingly necessary as a guarantee of a correct orientation and one which responds to the true spiritual and pastoral needs of priestly formation.

In recent times, a valuable teaching aid has been offered to educators in seminaries through the publishing of textbooks and bibliographical appendices which some Faculties are promoting with laudable zeal, responding in this way to the explicit desire of many bishops and seminarians. Such aids merit therefore a sincere recognition, and they are to be encouraged.

16. The initiatives briefly noted here, even if they have not fully achieved the goals fixed by the official norms of the Church, are, nevertheless, truly efficacious. They are to be considered an important step in the renewal of seminaries. Where these have taken place in a serene and constructive spirit, the life of seminaries has been strengthened. The exchange of ideas and practical experiences, of information regarding the use of the pedagogical sciences, and the communication of the results of scientific studies have been and are of inestimable value to educators. There are also many other contri-

butions: greater doctrinal, spiritual, and pastoral depth with regard to priestly life and ministry; commentaries on the relative documents of the Popes and of the Holy See; wider personal contacts with colleagues and experts; and, not least in importance, closer ties with bishops; in this way they better sense themselves aided and understood by the bishops.

## II

### THE EDUCATORS AND THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR FORMATION

17. As is clear from the Gospels, the formation of the Apostles is a responsibility that Jesus reserved for himself, attributing a fundamental importance to it for the future of the Church. He then entrusted this responsibility to the Apostles so that they might continue his work in the same way, with the special assistance of the Holy Spirit, and might become in turn educators of their disciples and collaborators. For this reason, it can be said that the Divine Teacher is the first inspirer and model for every educator and that "there cannot exist any genuine formational work for the priesthood without the influence of the Spirit of Christ."<sup>6</sup>

The uninterrupted tradition of the Church bears testimony that bishops, successors of the Apostles, have always exercised this mission as educators of the ministers of Christ at the service of the people of the New Covenant, while fulfilling their inalienable responsibility in different ways according to different circumstances of time and place, and using various forms of mediation and collaboration. In fact, this responsibility generally included the task of choosing and preparing suitable educators for the future clergy.

18. "The first representative of Christ in priestly formation is the Bishop:"<sup>7</sup> in this way the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation affirms the responsibility of the bishop for the initial and continuing formation of his clergy.

<sup>6</sup> PDV, n. 65.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

The bishop exercises the duty and the proper and exclusive right which belong to the Church in the formation of those who are destined for the sacred ministry<sup>7</sup> when he chooses, calls, forms and admits to the sacrament of Orders the candidates whom he considers fit. From this formational responsibility concerning the candidates for the priesthood, comes the need that he "should make a point of visiting them often and in some way 'being' with them."<sup>8</sup>

However, he cannot normally carry out this ministry alone. The vocational discernment and the formative responsibilities are of such complexity and importance that they are greater than what is possible for one person alone.

The bishop therefore calls other people to share with him a great part of his responsibilities in this field: he should choose collaborators who are particularly apt and attend to their formation with special attention and solicitude. He needs "priests of exemplary life" and "maturity and strength of personality... both from the human and from the Gospel points of view."<sup>9</sup>

The superiors (or administrators) and teachers placed at the service of seminaries are therefore the closest collaborators of the bishop in his responsibility to form the clergy of his diocese. They should be aware that they have received tills responsibility from the bishop, exercising it in close union with him, and in conformity with his directives. It is not a private but a public activity, one that enters into the very structure of the Church: "the seminary is, in itself, an original experience of the Church's life. In it the bishop is present through the ministry of the rector and the service of co-responsibility and communion fostered by him with the other teachers."<sup>10</sup> Therefore they carry out an eminently ecclesial service, characterized by fraternal relations, by collaboration with colleagues, and by hierarchical dependence on the local bishop, in communion with the Supreme Pontiff, sincerely heeding his directives for the universal Church.

<sup>7</sup> Can. 232, Code of Canon Law.

<sup>8</sup> PDV, n. 65.

<sup>9</sup> PDV, n. 66.

<sup>10</sup> PDV, n. 60.

However, carrying out responsibilities of leadership in a seminary also requires a just autonomy of action for the Rector, determined by the Code of Canon Law (cf. Can. 238, 260, 261), and by the Statutes and Regulations of the seminary.

19. Analogously, in due proportion and always in reference to Can. 659, §3 CCL, one can speak of the congregations and of canonically erected societies of apostolic life to be able to give to their communities the priests necessary for the fulfillment of their mission. Such rights and duties actually include also for them, in conformity with n. 31 of the *Directive regarding the formation in Religious Institutes*, the responsibility of providing for the preparation of the educators for the formation communities in which the members of these families of consecrated life prepare themselves for the ministerial priesthood.

20. Keeping in mind the indications of the Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* and of the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* cited in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, it may be appropriate to include in the formation work of the seminary, "in ways that are prudent and adapted to the different cultural contexts, the cooperation also of lay faithful, both men and women, in the work of training future priests. They are to be selected with care... according to their particular charisms and proven competence."<sup>11</sup> There may also be opportunities for fruitful collaboration on the part of permanent deacons. The activity of these persons, "suitably coordinated and integrated in the primary educational responsibilities of those entrusted with the formation of future priests,"<sup>12</sup> will enrich the process of formation, above all in those areas in which lay faithful and deacons normally have a particular competence, such as family spirituality, the difficult questions of the sciences, bioethics, ecology, the history of art, the means of social communication, and classical and modern languages.

21. Educators can also receive useful formative contributions from priests actively caring for souls, from lay faithful who are engaged in the apostolate, and from ecclesial associations and movements. The educators can take advantage of their experiences re-

<sup>11</sup> PDV, n. 66.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

garding the problems that everyday life poses to faith and pastoral care.<sup>13</sup> A close and lively relationship of service and mutual esteem among the seminary, the presbyterate, and the diocesan community is an indispensable condition for the complete fruitfulness of these contributions to the formation of the educators.

This being rooted in the community of the clergy and faithful shows itself to be very beneficial above all in dioceses with long and sound traditions of priestly formation. These traditions form the spirit of the seminary and of the educators. It is necessary therefore to appreciate them and profit from them in the preparation of the candidates for the work of formation, seeking not only to conserve these traditions, but also to transmit them, newly enriched, to future generations.

22. The whole Christian community should sense the problem of the selection and formation of seminary educators as its own. It is an aspect that cannot be isolated from the life and responsibilities of the diocesan community. Experience teaches that where the faith is vital, the charisms brought forth by God can work fruitfully, relying on prayer and on the support and solidarity of many.

Nonetheless, the direct responsibility formation of the educators in seminaries and in religious houses falls upon Bishops and Major Superiors. They are the ones who should concern themselves with guaranteeing for the collaborators they choose an adequate, specific formation, either through personal contact, or through suitable institutes or similar means.

### III

## CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION OF THE EDUCATORS

### Introduction

23. The Church is very demanding regarding the criteria for the selection of educators. According to the decree *Optatam Totius*, "seminary superiors and professors should be chosen from among the

<sup>13</sup> PDV, nn. 59, 60.

best.”<sup>14</sup> Regarding this point, the Council echoes the Encyclical of Pius XI *Ad Catholici Sacerdotii* which addresses to the Bishops the following exhortation: “Be careful especially in the choice of moderators and teachers... and assign to sacred colleges of this type priests endowed with the greatest virtue; and do not hesitate to remove them from duties which, though in appearance of much greater import, can in no way be compared with this foremost duty, whose elements are supplied by nothing else.”<sup>15</sup>

This exact duty is to be understood in the sense of an urgent call to consider the problem of educators as one of the most important pastoral priorities. Nothing which can give seminaries the directing and teaching personnel which they need should remain untried in the diocese.

24. The essential qualities required, to which the cited documents allude, have been more explicitly specified in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*,<sup>16</sup> in the *Ratio Fundamentalis*<sup>17</sup> and in the national *Rationes*. Among other things mention is made of the need of possessing a strong spirit of faith, an active priestly and pastoral consciousness, stability in one's own vocation, a clear ecclesial sense, a skill for human relations and leadership, a mature psychological, emotional, and affective equilibrium, intelligence united with prudence and wisdom, a true cultivation of the mind and heart, the capacity to collaborate, a profound knowledge of the mind of a young person, and a community spirit.

25. The vocation of the educator implies, on the one hand, a certain “charism,” which is expressed in gifts of nature and of grace and, on the other, certain capacities and attitudes that must be acquired. In every consideration regarding the personality of the educator, this double aspect must be kept in mind; each of the characteristics desirable in a seminary educator presents elements which are, in a manner of speaking, innate, and others which must be progressively developed by means of study and experience.

<sup>14</sup> N. 5.

<sup>15</sup> AAS 28 (1936), pp. 37-52.

<sup>16</sup> N. 66.

<sup>17</sup> N. 39.

Specification of the criteria for the selection of educators always presupposes an ideal which reflects the various qualities mentioned above, together with many others that may be deduced from the ensemble of the formation objectives indicated in *Pastores Dabo Vobis*. In the following sections an attempt will be made to present an ample selection of these, without however pretending that all of these gifts and qualities are perfectly realized in any one person. The purpose is simply to offer a point of reference in the search for and choice of educators, which may also serve as criterion for programming their formation and evaluating their service. While keeping in mind the limits imposed by the actual circumstances and by human possibilities, it is useful to place the ideal somewhat higher than these foreseeable limits, so that it may constitute a constant challenge and stimulus to overcome these.

## **A. TRAITS COMMON TO ALL SEMINARY EDUCATORS**

### **1. Spirit of faith**

26. The purpose and goal of formation in the seminary can be understood only in the light of faith. For this reason the educator should be first of all a man of sound, well-motivated, convinced and profoundly lived faith in such a way that it shows in all his words and actions. A faith animated by charity radiates in his life the joy and hope of a total self-donation to Christ and to his Church. This is manifested in the choice of an evangelical way of life and in a sincere adherence to the moral and spiritual values of the priesthood, which he seeks to communicate with sensitivity and conviction. Amid the variety of opinions in the dogmatic, moral and pedagogical field, the educator is inspired by criteria dictated by faith, following with heartfelt and intelligent submissiveness the indications of the magisterium. In this way, he knows himself to be a "teacher of the faith"<sup>18</sup> for his students, helping them to discover faith's beauty and its values for having, and shows himself to be sensitive and attentive to their journey of faith, helping them to overcome their difficulties.

27. The educator who lives by faith teaches more by what he is than by what he says. His faith is manifested in a coherent priestly

<sup>18</sup> PO, nn. 6,13.



life, animated by apostolic zeal and by a lively missionary sense. "Directors and teachers need to be keenly aware of how greatly the outcome of seminary formation depends on their own manner of thinking and acting."<sup>19</sup> They manifest, in a simple and convincing manner, the spiritual richness and beauty, as well as the fruitfulness of good works, which arise from a faith lived in the form of ministry and priestly life. He who has found, within the horizon of faith, the meaning of his life and his own priesthood, is capable of radiating the joy of his own vocation, communicating it to the others.

The spirit of faith should be accompanied and sustained by love of prayer. Seminarians have more need today than ever to be taught "the deep human meaning and religious value of silence,"<sup>20</sup> as a condition for knowing and experiencing the authentic sense of prayer, of the Liturgy, of Eucharistic worship, and of a sincere Marian devotion. The teachers of faith should therefore become true masters of prayer and exemplary liturgical celebration for their students.

## 2. Pastoral sense

28. "The whole formation imparted to candidates for the priesthood aims at preparing them to enter into communion with the charity of Christ the Good Shepherd. Hence, their formation in its different aspects must have a fundamentally pastoral character."<sup>21</sup> All of the educators should concern themselves with turning every aspect of formation towards this principal aim of the seminary. In particular the professors, without detriment to the proper academic character of their task, should stress the pastoral value of study, having it contribute to "revealing to the minds of the students with ever increasing clarity the mystery of Christ... in such a way that the students will see the meaning of ecclesiastical studies, their inter-relationship, and their pastoral intent."<sup>22</sup>

The educators will draw this sensitivity from their own participation in the pastoral charity of Christ, experienced in the ministry

<sup>19</sup> OT, n. 5.

<sup>20</sup> PDV, n. 47.

<sup>21</sup> PDV, n. 57, cf. also OT, n. 4.

<sup>22</sup> OT, n. 14.

they engaged in before their appointment, and generously cultivated during their service as educators, though within the obvious limits allowed by their commitment to the seminary. In their various contributions to formation, they should seek to open the seminarians up ever more each day to the "problem that is strongly felt these days... the demand for the evangelization of cultures and the inculturation of the message of faith,"<sup>23</sup> helping them to "love and have the essential missionary dimension of the Church and her different pastoral activities."<sup>24</sup>

### 3. Spirit of communion

29. The educators should live in "the strictest harmony in spirit and action. Among themselves and with their students they should constitute a family such as to translate into practice the Lord's prayer "that they be one" (cf. Jn 17:11) and to nourish in each student the joy of his calling."<sup>25</sup>

This "communion," authoritatively called for by the Council, closely concerns the nature of the ministerial priesthood and the exercise of its ministry. As *Pastores Dabo Vobis* states in this regard, "precisely because within the Church's life the priest is a man of communion, in his relations with all people he must be a man of mission and dialogue."<sup>26</sup> It can be said that the educator is authentic in his service and responds to the demands of his priestly ideal only in the measure to which he knows how to commit himself and sacrifice himself for the unity of the community and, when in his thoughts, in his attitudes, and in his prayer he reflects concern for the union and the cohesion of the community entrusted to him. This aspect of formational activity requires natural gifts and gifts of grace, and is cultivated through a special docility to the Holy Spirit, who is the link of unity in the heart of the divine life and in the life of the Church.

Inspired by an authentic "ecclesiology of communion,"<sup>27</sup> the educators will be able to teach the seminary community to "witness

<sup>23</sup> PDV, n. 55.

<sup>24</sup> PDV, n. 59.

<sup>25</sup> OT, n. 5.

<sup>26</sup> PDV, n. 18.

<sup>27</sup> PDV, n. 12.

in all their relationships to fraternity, service and a common quest for the truth, as well as a concern for the promotion of justice and peace. This is the case above all with the brethren of other Churches and Christian denominations; but also extends to the followers of other religions; to all people of good will."<sup>28</sup>

30. As we have already mentioned, this principle of communion manifests itself in a prompt and fraternal capacity to collaborate.

The educators should be capable of a close relationship with the rector, who has the most important and weighty responsibility in the governance of the seminary, especially when dealing with establishing or safeguarding the unity of the formational program. The elaboration of the rule of life, of the programs: of study, and of the spiritual, pastoral, and liturgical formation, requires a mutual working together, and a willingness to consider the common objectives and criteria of discernment given by the Church and the bishop as normative and as prevailing over personal points of view.

This spirit of collaboration and understanding is of fundamental importance especially in the adoption of criteria of vocational discernment for the admission of candidates to the seminary and to holy orders. In this matter, while respecting the diversity of roles and responsibilities, all the members of the administration should feel themselves jointly responsible, showing a capacity for sound evaluations which are in conformity with the norms of the Church. But also in other circumstances it is always necessary to keep in mind that not just the rector or spiritual director is responsible for the success of formation, but all the members of the educational team.

31. The spirit of collaboration that should be established among the teachers of the different disciplines merits its own consideration. The teachers should be aware of forming a single body, concerned for the interrelationships and the unity among the different disciplines.<sup>29</sup> This task appears difficult in these times of wide-spread theological pluralism and the fragmentation of teaching staff, often forced to have recourse to the occasional collaboration of visiting professors. This difficulty creates the need for an even greater capacity to work together collaboratively.

<sup>28</sup> PDV, n. 18.

<sup>29</sup> *Ratio fundamentalis*, n. 90; cf. n. 63.

32. A particular problem arises from the need to establish a good harmony between theological teaching and the formational policy of the seminary, with its vision of the priesthood and of the various questions concerning the life of the Church. This spirit of understanding, which must be continually strengthened in the institutes which have their own theological teaching staff, is even more necessary in those cases in which studies are carried out at theological Faculties or in other Institutes of theological studies. To such an end, "the teacher of theology, like any other educator, should remain in communion and sincerely cooperate with all the other people who are involved in the formation of future priests, and offer with scientific precision, generosity, humility and enthusiasm his own original and expert contribution."<sup>30</sup>

Considering the fluidity and complexity of the problems in the theological, pastoral and formational field today, it should be clear that the desired unity of spirit and action remains for the educators an ideal that is acquired day by day, and cannot be achieved all at once. Their capacity for collaboration and their sense of communion are put to a continuous and necessary test, and require, therefore, particularly balanced personalities who are gifted in this regard.

#### **4. Human maturity and psychological equilibrium**

38. This aspect of the personality is difficult to define abstractly, but it corresponds concretely to the capacity to create and maintain a serene atmosphere, to keep friendly relationships which express understanding and affability, and to possess a constant self-control. Far from withdrawing into himself, the educator should take an interest in his work and in those who surround him as well as the problems that he has to deal with daily. Personifying the ideal that he proposes, he becomes an example to imitate, capable of true leadership, and therefore, capable of involving the student in the project of his own formation.

The importance of this fundamental personality trait must be constantly kept in mind in order to avoid pedagogical failures, which can happen in the case of educators who are unsatisfied, stressed, and anxious. They pass their difficulties on to the seminarians, depress-

<sup>30</sup> PDV, n. 67.

ing them and hindering their normal human and spiritual development.

34. Intimately linked with maturity is wisdom, understood as the right consciousness of one's self, of one's own value and of one's own limits, honestly recognized and serenely accepted. A mature educator possesses a good critical detachment from himself, is open to learn, knows how to accept criticisms and observations and is ready and willing to correct himself. Only in this way will he know how to be justly demanding also with others, while not forgetting the difficulties and limits of human capabilities. A good and constant predisposition to wise, balanced decisions and to patience will assure that a sense of duty is never to be confused with a discouraging rigorism, and that an understanding love should not become a weakness that gives in.

## **5. Clear and mature capacity to love**

35. As an integral part and essential consequence of the above-mentioned overall maturity, it is important that educators have a good, mature affectivity. This term is understood as the free and stable possession of one's own affective world: the capacity to love and to allow one's self to do so in a right and purified way. He who possesses this capacity is normally inclined to a self-giving attention to the other person, to an intimate understanding of his problems, and to a clear perception of his real good. Such a person also appreciates the gratitude, respect, and affection of others, even while not exacting these and never making them the condition of his own willingness to serve. He who is affectively mature will never bind others to himself; instead, he will be able to form in them an equally self-giving affectivity, concentrated and founded on the love received from God in Jesus Christ and, in the end, always referred to him.

The postsynodal Exhortation underlines in more than one context the importance of this aspect for the formation of future priests: it is not possible to guarantee them the necessary growth towards the serene and liberating possession of this mature affectivity if the educators are not examples and models of it in the first place.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>31</sup> PDV, n. 44.

36. The educators therefore have need of an authentic pedagogical sense, that is, an attitude of spiritual paternity, expressed in an attentive, while at the same time respectful and discreet, accompaniment of the growth of the person, united to a healthy capacity for self-reflection, and lived in a climate of reciprocal trust and esteem. It is a special talent that cannot be improvised. Pedagogical sense is to a certain degree innate, and cannot be teamed like a theory, nor substituted for by purely exterior attitudes; but at the same time, it can be developed and perfected by the attentive and self-examining exercise of the task of formation and a good knowledge of the principles of a sound psycho-pedagogy.

## **6. Listening, dialogue, and the capacity for communication**

37. The success of the formational relationship depends in great part of these three capacities. On the one hand, there is the educator with his role of counseling and guiding, and on the other, there is the student called to adopt an attitude of free initiative. In this relationship, a great deal depends on psychologically well chosen and well spaced-out interventions of the educator. It is necessary to avoid behavior which is too passive and fails to promote dialogue, but also to avoid an excessive invasiveness which may block it. The capacity for real and profound communication succeeds in touching the center of the person of the student; it is not satisfied with an external perception, in essence dangerously deceptive, of the values which are communicated; it stirs up vital dynamism of capacity for relationships that bring into play the most authentic and radical motivations of the person, who feels accepted, stimulated, and appreciated. Such contacts should be frequent, to measure progress, to orient goals, adapting the formational assistance to the pace of each one, and succeeding in this way in individualizing the level at which the true problems and difficulties of each person are grasped.

38. To be capable of this, the educators should have not only a normal perspicacity, but also fundamental capacities in the human sciences of interpersonal communication and the dynamics of human decision. The youth of today are for the most part generous, but fragile. They feel a strong, at times excessive, need for security and understanding, and they show the marks of a family and social atmosphere that is not always healthy. It is necessary to attend to and integrate this need with great spiritual and pedagogical tact.

39. To fulfill his duty efficaciously, the educator should be a good communicator, capable of presenting clearly those values and notions which are the object of formation, adapted to the receptivity of the students. The seminary, therefore, in the very formulation of the educational task, should become a school of communication that, while stimulating its true vitality, prepares future priests for the delicate tasks of evangelization.

In a recent document, the Congregation for Catholic Education speaks about the need to create a climate of communication among the students and with the educators that would train them to engage in frequent interpersonal and group dialogue, to be attentive to correctness of language, clearness of exposition and logical argumentation. This will serve as a corrective to the passivity which can be occasioned by the one-dimensional communications and images of the mass media.<sup>32</sup>

Also teachers, to the extent that it is their responsibility, should cultivate the greatest possible ability to communicate, updating their own language, and keeping in mind the demands of a proper inculturation of the truths of faith: "that without all concerned, without distinction, united in heart and will, should apply themselves to achieving that communion which according to the Christian faith constitute the primary and ultimate end of every communication."<sup>33</sup>

40. It is also the task of the educators to maintain the vitality of the formation community, to orient it and to stimulate it so that it achieves its ends. This activity demands foresight, execution, and the guiding of processes in which attitudes of responsible participation and openness to a generous and active commitment within the community can mature. This requires a knowledge of how to manage the specific tasks and diverse roles of the community of educators, and the subdivisions of the large community of the seminary, with a wise selection of means adapted for the coordination, motivation, and direction of all energies towards the set goal.

Aside from certain natural gifts, the educator should acquire a knowledge of the methodological principles that rule the organization

<sup>32</sup> "Orientation for the formation of future priests regarding the instruments of social communication" 19 March 1986, n. 24.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

and the smooth operation of a complex network of relationships and responsibilities.

The attention which must be given to this matter, for example through the use of group dynamics or active teaching methods, has no other end than to obtain a greater and more profound involvement of the seminarians in the formative process, in which all should share and not merely undergo. Indeed, they "must not forget that the candidate himself is a necessary and irreplaceable agent in his own formation."<sup>34</sup>

## **7. Positive and critical attention to modern culture**

41. Inspired by the cultural richness of Christianity, and rooted in biblical, liturgical and panistic sources, the educator of future priests must have a broad knowledge of contemporary culture. The relationships between educator and student and their efficacy are greatly helped by a knowledge of all that contributes to form the mentality and way of life of society today. This can be applied to the western industrialized world and to the indigenous cultures of mission territories as much as to a particular social class of laborers, of farm workers, etc. Such an intellectual resource helps the educator to understand the seminarians better and to develop an appropriate pedagogy for them, situating it in the cultural context of our times. For example, the variety of currents of thought, the accelerated variability of political and social conditions, the literary, musical, and artistic works generally poured out at great speed by the mass media, and the technological and scientific conquests with their effects on life, should all be taken into consideration. A profound, positive, and critical awareness of these phenomena contributes notably to an organic and well thought-out transmission of contemporary culture, making it easier for the students to form an interior synthesis in the light of faith. The educator also should have formed this synthesis himself, and should continually update it, through the use of a wide scientific, philosophical and theological knowledge, without which there is no true integration of human knowing.<sup>35</sup>

42. This quality presupposes that the educator has a healthy openness of spirit. Far from withdrawing and closing in on himself,

<sup>34</sup> PDV, n. 69.

<sup>35</sup> John Paul II: Apost. Const. *Ex corde Ecclesiae*, n. 16.



he should be sensitive to the problems of the persons and social groups of the whole Church. He should be a "magnanimous" man: that is a man whose widespread vision permits him to understand events and their causes, their complexity and their social and religious implications, properly distancing himself from any attitude which is superficially emotional and linked to the ephemeral and the transitory.

## **B. QUALIFICATIONS FOR THE PRINCIPAL OFFICES**

43. Besides the qualities common to all, the concrete image of the educator takes on certain nuances according to the different duties entrusted to him. It is appropriate to refer briefly to some of them.

In order to become more aware of the qualities that should mark the rector of the seminary, it is necessary to consider the various functions and responsibilities that his office entails. He represents the bishop; he is the first one responsible for the life of the seminary, besides being its representative, in both ecclesiastical and civil setting.<sup>36</sup> He follows and promotes the formation of the students under all its aspects, seeing to the harmony and reciprocal integration of every aspect. After hearing and evaluating the counsel and advice of his collaborators, he has the responsibility of making synthetic judgments to be expressed to the Bishop regarding the suitability for admission to the seminary, to the various phases of formation, and to holy orders. If the formational task is above all the creative and prudent projection and channeling of relations and experiences, the rector is its first agent and coordinator. It is up to him to assure the unity of the direction it takes and its harmony with the choices of the bishop and the Church, assisting its realization in the widest possible collaboration on the part of all. It is easy to see how much is asked for in terms of experience and authoritativeness in order to act in this complex of difficult administrative and educational responsibilities. In fact the requirements are great prudence, wisdom, and balance.

44. The role of the Spiritual Director or Father is also very demanding. The responsibility for the spiritual journey of the semi-

<sup>36</sup> Code of Canon Law 238 §2; 260.

narians in the internal forum falls upon him, as well as the coordination of the various exercises of piety and of the liturgical life of the seminary. He is also the coordinator of the other priests authorized by the Bishop to give spiritual direction to the students, as well as of the confessors, in order to assure unity of criteria for the discernment of the vocation. Beyond the gifts of wisdom, affective maturity, and pedagogical sense, he should have at his disposition a solid basis of formation in theological, spiritual, and pedagogical culture, together with a special sensitivity to the processes of the interior life of the students.

45. Usually, especially in large seminaries, there is also a Vice-Rector, who assists the Rector in areas of seminary life assigned to him and who replaces him when he is absent. He should show strong pedagogical gifts, a joyful love of the service he renders and a spirit of collaboration. Similar attitudes are also needed from the other collaborators: the business manager, the coordinator of pastoral activities, the prefect of studies, the librarian, the coordinators of various activities, and those associated in various ways and at different levels with the responsibilities of formation.

46. According to the directives of the Church, the Professors should consider themselves true formation personnel, even when the scholastic or academic institution is distinct from that of the seminary. They contribute to the formation of the future priests by means of a very important and delicate role: instruction should nurture a solid mentality of faith that will enable the seminarians to become servants of the Gospel and teachers of the people of God. Regarding this formational responsibility, *Pastores dabo vobis* affirms that the Professors "often have a greater influence of the development of the priest's personality than other educators."<sup>37</sup>

It is therefore necessary that the Professors be particularly sensitive to transmitting a complete and sound doctrine, even while not neglecting the appropriate study of questions in greater depth as well as of the problems which may be present. To them falls the task of guaranteeing the overall growth of an adequate competence in the

<sup>37</sup> N. 67.

humanistic, philosophical, and theological disciplines which will lead to a profound association of the Christian mystery, complete and directed towards the pastoral ministry.

The teacher must show that his own knowledge, especially theological, has become a spiritual patrimony for him, an intimately assimilated value that has illuminated and transformed his life. In this sense, teaching should become a discourse made by a praying and believing subject, in whom the understanding of the mystery coincides with an interior bond with it. One of the fundamental gifts of a seminary Professor therefore, beyond scientific and didactic competence, is his ability to be a convinced witness of faith.

47. The long and detailed list of qualities required of formation personnel in seminaries should not lead one to forget that the suitability of a person does not result from the juxtaposition of these characteristics. A true maturity and fullness of gifts arises from the harmonious and integrated ensemble of elements possessed in depth. It is therefore necessary to consider the personality of the candidate for this ministry in his most fundamental attitudes and convictions, and in their totality. With reference to this the evaluation of the individual aspects of his spiritual physiognomy can be made appropriately.

## IV

### THE FORMATION OF THE EDUCATOR'S

48. Having specified the identity of the educator with its various requisites as the condition for an accurate selection of the candidates, the problem arises of a should preparation for the duties involved. *Pastores dabo vobis* underlines the necessity of a "special preparation of those to whom this work is entrusted, one that is professional, pedagogical, spiritual, human and theological."<sup>38</sup> This includes an initial phase, possibly before the office is received, and a successive phase of periodical updating - that is, continuing formation.

<sup>38</sup> N. 66.

## **A. THE INITIAL PHASE**

### **1. Diversity of itinerary**

49. The future educators present, in general, different formational needs depending on their studies and activities prior to their appointment, and according to the diverse duties to which they are called.

Future teachers are in a better situation in this regard when, possibly after a suitable period of direct pastoral experience, they can dedicate themselves to specialized studies in the area of their competence. For the other educators - rectors, spiritual directors and collaborators - the path is different. There are few possibilities of obtaining previous specialized preparation for such a task in an institute for the formation of educators of the clergy, either because such institutes are still very few, or because the conditions of ministerial service in which they find themselves generally do not permit them to dedicate themselves completely and for a sufficient length of time to such preparatory studies. There are many obstacles to the concrete realization of the recommendations of the Council and of the Synods. Therefore, great flexibility joined with a sense of realism is necessary in order to give the initial phase of the formation a useful and consistent program.

50. Holding inn to the goal of a special preparation, beyond that common to all priests; it is necessary to seek within the variety of means and situations the most appropriate ways to attain it. Where the resources of personnel and means allow, the future educators should receive a solid previous preparation. In other cases the preparatory phase will, necessarily, be combined with other habitual occupations and even with the beginning of work in the seminary.

51. There are dioceses which, to prevent precarious and makeshift solutions, program the selection and preparation of the educators in a gradual and remote way. Taking care not to confer disproportionate responsibility too soon, in a way that would be inappropriate and educationally unhelpful, certain individuals who show signs of

being suitable for educational work can be singled out during the seminary years, and entrusted with some initial task of organizing others and of service to the community. After coordination, they can be placed in ministries the nature of which would stimulate the growth of and provide the possibility to evaluate such capacities. Finally, it is possible to begin their direct involvement in the formational community of the seminary with duties of collaboration, such as that of assistant or vice-rector, guided and sustained by their older and more experienced confreres. Such an itinerary, joined to attendance at meetings and courses of spirituality. Pedagogy and psychology which are easily available today in various academic centers, can prepare a priest to become a rector or spiritual director, allowing the bishop at the same time to weigh carefully the candidate's capacity and overall maturity.

52. Whatever type of formational itinerary is chosen, it is necessary that in every case there be a serious program, examined in every detail regarding time, methods, and contents. It is important to distinguish between the fundamental requisites, necessary for a basic preparation that must be required from the beginning, and the various capacities, and knowledge which can be acquired and cultivated even at a later time.

## **2. The fundamental lines of formation**

### *a) Doctrinal preparation*

53. An ample and thorough doctrinal preparation is indispensable, and must precede the taking up of any formational work, not only for professors but for all educators. One possible indication of suitability is that of having made good use of the philosophical-theological studies before ordination and, desirably, the earning of an academic degree in some ecclesiastical science.

It is necessary to determine that the aforementioned theological culture of the educators have some important characteristics:

— the clear perception of the common doctrine of the Church, in conformity with the teachings of the magisterium and the consequent discernment of the limits of theological pluralism;

- deep and motivated convictions regarding the importance of a sound philosophical and theological formation against the tendencies towards a superficial pragmatism and pastoral "immediatism;"

— a deeply assimilated theological culture in contact with life, which enables them, to be apt for dialogue with the students, in order to deepen their doctrinal patrimony and prepare them for their future pastoral duties;

— a suitable updating in the sacred disciplines, so as to be able to maintain a fruitful dialogue with the professors and an exchange of ideas regarding the formational problems of the students;

— a lively ecclesial sense joined with a consciousness of the nature and mission of the various states of life within the Church;

— a special missionary and ecumenical sensitivity with regard to the problems of life in the Church, the challenges of evangelization and the proper ways of inculturation of the faith.

54. In the theological background of the educator, clarity of ideas about the priesthood, its ministry and the conditions of life that it requires has a particular prominence. A good knowledge of historical, theological, and pastoral problems is necessary enabling the educator to give a secure orientation to the seminarians, and respond in a pertinent and persuasive way to the difficulties that are raised by these problems. In the vastness of material to be treated, *Pastores dabo vobis* highlights how 'the importance of a careful preparation for priestly celibacy, especially in the present social and cultural situations,' requires that those responsible for priestly formation "establish principles, offer criteria, and give assistance for discernment in this matter."<sup>39</sup> This presupposes a good consciousness of the pertinent indications of the Pontifical Magisterium and of the directives and practice of the Roman Curia, of sure scientific data, as well as of the judgments and exchange of experiences of expert educators.

It is particularly important not to forget the necessity of knowing exactly the various canonical norms regarding the admission of candidates to the seminary and to Orders,<sup>40</sup> as well as the norms concerning the running of the seminary, in its various aspects.

<sup>39</sup> N. 50.

<sup>40</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, Circular letter of 27 July 1992.

### *b) Spiritual preparation*

55. As for the specific spiritual preparation in the strict sense, besides the qualities common to every good priest, it is necessary to guarantee in the educators the formation of certain attitudes of great importance in this work:

- a true liberty of spirit which renders the educator sensitive and attentive to the movements of grace, in order to be able to discern the signs of the divine will in the life of the candidates entrusted to his guidance;

- a spirituality free from every exaggerated subjectivism, and rooted in the tradition of the Church, which will render the educator attentive not to confuse subjective preferences and criteria with the essential demands of the plan of God;

- a proper concern for the deepening of the diocesan spirituality and the unity of the presbyterate, joined with a sensitivity for the specific characteristics of the various charisms of consecrated life;

- a healthy openness of spirit, capable of harmonizing the classical forms of priestly spirituality with the new demands and nuances of the spiritual currents of our time;

- a sound knowledge of spiritual theology, of the laws of the development of the Christian interior life, of the rules of discernment, and of the dynamics of the relationships between the spiritual director and the seminarian, drawing upon the classics of the Western and Eastern tradition and also dedicating an adequate attention to modern and contemporary author's;

- a love for the liturgy and an understanding of its role in spiritual and ecclesial formation;

- the assiduous and meditative reading of the Encyclicals, the documents of the Holy See and of the local Church, regarding the priesthood vocation.

This complex of attitudes and knowledge is necessary so that the educator can provide a systematic spiritual orientation for the candidate and be capable of promoting and evaluating his progress in the individual stages along the way. Confessors also should have the same preparation.

### *c) Pastoral preparation*

56. Significant pastoral experience is also indispensable for the educator in the seminary in order to enable him to harmonize the work of formation and discernment with the real needs of the faithful and of the ministry. The official documents of the Church do not speak about the duration and type of this experience. In any case, it should be such that it allows the educator to be able to evaluate competently the attitudes of the seminarians for various pastoral duties and the effectiveness of the preparation which they receive for that purpose.

Among the abilities of the educators in this field, the following should be pointed out:

- the programming of the pastoral experience of the students, their supervision and evaluation;
- the harmonization of the intellectual formation of the students with the pastoral demands of the minister;
- the ability to present the theoretical and practical needs of the various fields of pastoral life, in harmony and dialogue with the teaching staff and in particular with the teachers of the pastoral subjects;
- an effective attention to the formation of a proper equilibrium between evangelization and human and social promotion, taking into account the general pastoral policies of the diocese and of the universal Church;
- integration into the giving pastoral tradition of the particular Church and openness towards the missionary dimension of ecclesial life.<sup>41</sup>

### *d) Pedagogical preparation*

57. *Pastores dabó vobis* insists on the necessity of a good preparation in the science of pedagogy and in the human science.<sup>42</sup> The same insistence was already present in *Optatam totius*.<sup>43</sup> It is a

<sup>41</sup> PDV, n. 58.

<sup>42</sup> N. 66.

<sup>43</sup> N. 20.



question of an indispensable initial preparation for all educators, which should be continued and updated throughout their whole life. It is necessary to promote the maturation of the competence required so that the educator can carry out the systematic observation of the seminarian, single out which of his attitudes and inclinations are to be encouraged, which are to be corrected, and the most significant traits of his personality.

The educator should be sufficiently prepared as not to be deceived or to deceive regarding a presumed consistency and maturity of the student. For this, "common sense" is not enough. An attentive and refined examination from a good knowledge of the human sciences is necessary in order to go beyond appearances and the superficial level of motivations and behavior, and to help the seminarian to know himself in depth, to accept himself with serenity, and to correct himself and to mature, starting from the real not illusory roots, and from the "heart," of his person.

58. Regarding this, it should not be forgotten that the principles of Christian pedagogy, which neither undervalue nor render absolute the contribution of the human sciences, remain normative and primary. On the contrary, they free this contribution of the human sciences from the ideological conditioning which often perverts the nature of this function.<sup>44</sup> The pedagogy of the seminary can never be neutral, even if it were possible that such a pedagogy could ever exist. It is totally permeated by evangelical values, and oriented towards the formation of true disciples of Christ, willing to take upon themselves the easy yoke of his pastoral charity. The formal principle of pedagogy, sociology, and psychology, as human sciences, acquire for the educator in the seminary a precise specificity, in as much as they are put at the service of an always better realization of "Christian education,"<sup>45</sup> framed in an exemplary liturgical and sacramental life, in a systematic individual and collective spiritual direction, and in the disciplinary norms necessary for the candidates "to provide self-mastery, to foster solid maturity of personality, and to develop other

<sup>44</sup> OT, n. 11: "The norms of Christian education are to be religiously maintained, and should be properly complemented by the latest findings in sound psychology and pedagogy."

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

traits of character which are extremely serviceable for the ordered and productive activity of the Church."<sup>46</sup> It is therefore a desirable synthesis of the educational experience of the Church, matured in the light of faith, of past experiences, of the examples of the saints, and the carefully weighed result of the human sciences.

59. The Church calls for assuming an attitude of trust in these fields of scientific research and exhorts the maintaining of a climate of mutual comprehension and dialogue with her,<sup>47</sup> but at the same time she marks its limits, inasmuch as "each particular science is able to grasp only a partial — yet true aspect about man."<sup>48</sup> In fact, concrete dangers of generalization due to incomplete results, and the risk of the ideological conditioning of such research exist, and cannot be ignored.

The following are therefore necessary:

- a constant reference to an overall and complete vision of a man, which is offered to us by a sound theological anthropology;<sup>49</sup>

- a just philosophical meditation, for the necessary confrontation with the various psycho-pedagogical and social theories on the rational plane;

- a particular attention to the various magisterial pronouncements regarding specific moral problems,<sup>50</sup> and above all for the call for the respect for the intimacy and inviolability of the human conscience.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Paul VI, Apost. Lett. *Octogesima adveniens* (14 May 1971), n. 40.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Alloc. *Esta hora* to the Third General Assembly of CELAM, 28 January 1979 in Puebla: AAS 71 (1979) p. 195f.

<sup>50</sup> For example: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration regarding certain questions of sexual ethics *Persona humana* (29 December 1975); "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church" about the pastoral care of homosexuals (1 October 1986); Circular letter regarding some aspects of Christian meditation *Orationis formas* (15 October 1989).

<sup>51</sup> Apost. Const. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 16; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Admonition *Cum compertum* regarding psychoanalytical exams (1961); cf. also Code of Canon Law 220.

### 3. The specific preparation for the various roles

60. What has been set forth about the basic formation that is required for all educators should take on a few nuances aimed at the exercise of the particular duties reserved to the rector, to the spiritual director, to the teachers, to the coordinator of pastoral activities and to the other collaborators.

The multiple tasks of the *rector* are characterized as we have seen, by his relations with the bishops, with the other formational personnel, with the students, with the presbyterate and with the whole diocesan community. He is required to be a man capable of solid human relations on all levels, and above all a man of communion, capable on the one hand of making the most of the contributions and competencies of all, and on the other hand, of guiding the journey of individuals and of the community with firm hand and a capacity for decision, and worthy presenting the community on various occasions. In a special way it is expected that he have a clear sense of the seminary as an ecclesiastical institution, in order to guarantee its specific goals and to safeguard its unity of direction and programming. Therefore "a unity of leadership expressed in the figure of the Rector and his cooperators" is a necessary presupposition for the seminary to have "a clearly defined program" and in order that, without hesitation or ambiguity, this might be "at the service of the specific end which alone justifies the existence of the seminary, that is the formation of future priests, pastors of the Church."<sup>62</sup> This deals with capacities and convictions which are presupposed in every rector, but which can and must be continual perfected.

61. The *spiritual director* with his duty offering to the community and to individuals, in the confidential relationship of spiritual direction, a sure guidance in the search for the will of God and in vocational discernment, should refine his capacities to welcome, to listen, to converse and to understand, together with a good knowledge of spiritual theology, of the other theological disciplines, and of the human and pedagogical sciences. No means should be spared to give him the possibility of attending an institute or at least an intensive course of spirituality.

<sup>62</sup> PDV, nn. 61.

The preparation of the spiritual director for his multiple duties, and above all for that of care for the formation of the consciences of the students, has its foundation in serious studies and in an extensive practice of directing, which, to give good results, should be continuous and prolonged in time. It should be kept in mind that:

- spiritual direction is an essentially theological and ecclesial fact, distinct from psychological therapy or assistance; the person who receives direction should live it as a means and stimulus for his own journey of faith and obedience to the will of God;

- the spiritual director is, consequently, a witness of faith, and expert in the progressive and humble recognition of the plan of God for the life of his children;

- the various community forms of spiritual orientation, exchanging experiences, and the review of life, may supplement spiritual direction, but must never substitutes for it;

- the spiritual director is therefore the first guardian of his own identity and of his own duties which cannot be renounced or substituted for, and which can neither be confused with those of the other educators nor improperly substituted for with other types of formational service.

62. Beyond the scientific preparation in their respective disciplines, the *teachers* should acquire *good* didactic and pedagogical qualities and the capacity to animate group work and stimulate the active participation of the students. A suitable perfecting of their didactic skin requires attention to clear and precise communication, an appropriate renewal of theological language<sup>53</sup> and a constant concern to emphasize the intrinsic unity and harmony of the whole doctrine of the faith, being careful to put a special accent on its salvation aspect. Their teaching will acquire greater vitality if they learn to establish the links between their teaching on the one hand and piety, life, and pastoral problems on the other. Furthermore, they should familiarize themselves with the scientific methods of theological work, follow the progress of these, and introduce them, by means of guided private study, to the students. In order to be able to care for

<sup>53</sup> Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Theological Formation of Future Priests* (22 February 1976), 77.

the integral and not just scientific formation of the students, teachers should always seek to become more a part of the seminary community by means of collaboration and formative dialogue. *Pastores dabovobis* recommends that the educators "as a rule should live in the seminary community."<sup>64</sup>

63. The pastoral activity of the seminarians, recommended by the norms of the Church,<sup>65</sup> in order to be truly fruitful and to attain its formational objectives, needs to be oriented and coordinated by a well-experienced priest assigned expressly to this ministry. He should familiarize himself with certain principles of effective supervision and evaluation of such activities, and be inspired by the genuine principles of the sacred ministry in conformity with the norms of ecclesiastical authority. The priest with this duty, called *director*" or "*coordinator of pastoral activities*," should be respectful of the disciplinary arrangement of the seminary, proceeding in strict collaboration with the rector, with the other educators and teachers and, in particular, with the professor of pastoral theology.

64. Regarding the *other collaborators*, beyond the vice-rector and the assistance - who should have at least a solid basic formation - a "technical" preparation is necessary for some particular offices, such as those of librarian and business manager. For these and other similar offices an appropriate professional qualification is recommended, by means of attending a school or specialized courses. The importance of the library for the seriousness and good level of the studies, and the complexity and delicacy of administrative problems, require the collaboration of true experts in these offices.

## **B. THE CONTINUING FORMATION OF THE EDUCATORS**

65. The continuing formation of the educators responds to the desires expressed in Vatican II and in the *Ratio fundamentalis*.<sup>66</sup> It can be understood both as the progressive completion and the improving of the initial formation, so as to overcome repetition and the loss of competence, and as a factor of profound renewal, in the

<sup>64</sup> N. 66.

<sup>65</sup> OT, n. 21; *Ratio fundamentalis*, nn. 97-99.

<sup>66</sup> OT, n. 5; *Ration fundamentalis*, nn. 31. 36.

areas where educational methods and styles should be submitted to a more radical process of review. In any case, continuing formation, in the various forms in which, it is already undertaken and in those which may be devised in the future, has the same extension as the field of initial formation as out lined in the preceding paragraphs. It seeks the same end, refers to the same object, and uses the same methods. That which distinguishes it is the evaluation of experiences and the possibility of finding the opportunities and the means of evaluating them and keeping them under critical examination.

## **1. Constant updating**

66. The experience of the educators is itself a privileged source of their continuing formation. The educator learns and perfects himself through the concrete exercise of his ministry, provided that this is submitted to a constant and fraternal examination in dialogue with the other educators, comparing diverse formational models and progressively enlarging a prudent experimentation with projects, proposals, and initiatives.

The methodical analysis of concrete cases, which are often examined in courses of continuing education, proves at times to be more illuminating than the abstract explanation of principles. The educator can never close himself in the restricted sphere of his own personal experience, but should remain open to an evaluation and review based also on the contribution of the experiences of others.

The need for continuous updating and a mutual exchange of ideas with his peers and with experts is seen especially in some spheres of ecclesial and social life which are subjected to greater changes: the spiritual situation of young people, the conditions of priestly life and ministry, the profound and rapid changes in the currents of philosophical-theological thought and in cultural thought in general.

67. The knowledge of the world of youth and its nature is always open to new developments. Research and studies on such topics are progressively growing in descriptive, analytical, and reflexive aspects, and should be known and studied with ever renewed interest. The postsynodal Exhortation notes the influx of these changes: "There is a considerable discrepancy between, on the one hand, the

style of life and basic preparation of boys, adolescents and young men, even when they are Christians and at times have been involved in Church life, and, on the other hand, the style of life of the seminary with its formational demands.<sup>67</sup> The educator should be well informed regarding such transformations, which are always happening and taking on new aspects according to places and circumstances, in order to keep in touch with the reality that determines in great part his formational activity.

68. Besides an up-to-date knowledge of the world of youth as the point of departure of the formational process, it is also necessary to turn our attention to the conditions of priestly life and ministry which constitute the goal of this process. In the face of the changeableness and fluidity of pastoral situations, it is necessary to ask oneself continually what formational demands derive from them for future priests. The detailed analysis conducted in the first chapter of the Apostolic Exhortation underlines the importance of this aspect of the permanent formation of the educators, who are called on to ask themselves constantly the fundamental question: "How can we form priests who are truly able to respond to the demands of our times and capable of evangelizing the world of today?"<sup>68</sup>

69. The formational activity in the seminaries is moreover profoundly influenced by that which takes place in the theological field, and by the currents of thought and the attitudes towards life which derive from them. The responsibility of teaching philosophy and theology is, in this regard, very great. Not only the professors, but also the rector, the spiritual director and the other educators should constantly bring themselves up to date in a critical and precise fashion regarding these questions, submitting with docility to the light shed upon them by the pronouncements of the magisterium.<sup>69</sup>

## 2. Review

70. At times it will be necessary, in determined cases and in the face of complex questions, to choose some time of prolonged formation

<sup>67</sup> PDV, n. 62.

<sup>68</sup> PDV, n. 10.

<sup>69</sup> PDV, nn. 10. 67

and of radical review of formational topics, by attendance at specialized courses or by periods of guided review in some center of specialized study or some academic institution. The scope of such periods of formation is to favor an accurate examination of the very personality of the educator, his ministerial commitment, and his way of understanding and living his own mission of formation.

71. Periods of formation of this kind should include well chosen and appropriately planned courses, be it in the field of ecclesiastical or of the human sciences, joined with practical exercises carried out with the help of a supervisor and submitted to him for attentive critical review. In this way the educator will be able to become more actively conscious of his own capacities and attitudes, accept more serenely his own limits, and update and improve the criteria which inspire his action.

In programs of continuing formation of this magnitude, prolonged periods of spiritual renewal should be planned (Ignatian months, spiritual exercises, times of solitude) to allow the educator to review his own mission in its most profound spiritual and theological connections and roots.

## V

### OPERATIVE INSTRUCTION

#### 1. Problems of formation

72. If it is licit to speak of a relaunching of seminaries in some geographical and ecclesial areas, it is necessary at the same time to recall the need for the specific initial and continuing formation of the educators. Nothing can substitute for the benefits of a renewed and reasoned conviction in this regard on the part of bishops and of the others who are responsible in this field.

Some nations and local Churches have already taken appropriate decisions in the matter. Others should follow their example. To give a greater impulse to such initiatives, provisions should be made for a reciprocal exchange of experiences.



73. Even if it is not possible everywhere to create special institutes for the training of formational personnel, it is still necessary to move to a minimum of structure planning: to have groups of experts on hand in every nation, whose collaboration can always be relied upon; to establish a well defined program, regarding both the duration and frequency, as well as the content; a program that will respond to the needs and will guarantee a good structured unity and continuity of the formation. In the areas of greater geographic extension and linguistic and cultural homogeneity, an 'itinerant' institute may be considered which could offer intensive courses at the service of various local bodies.

74. Wherever possible, the collaboration of ecclesiastical universities and of other academic institutes and centers of research and study should be utilized for the objectives of continuing formation, above all for the study of the human sciences. In these cases, it would be well to arrange agreements ahead of time with the Episcopal Conference to assure the doctrinal solidity of the lines of formation.

75. Although, as has been seen, the means for a true and proper previous preparation of educators are in actual fact very restricted, it is still necessary that an appropriate period of specific spiritual and pedagogical preparation be granted to future rectors and spiritual directors before they are installed in their offices, perhaps combining this preparation with the exercise of other ministries in the seminary. A very special care should be dedicated to the initial and continuing formation of spiritual directors, considering the many difficulties of such a mission in today's seminary.

76. In the preparation of professors, it is necessary to require not only the corresponding canonically recognized degrees of study,<sup>60</sup> but also the possession of an appropriate spiritual, didactic and pedagogical formation, so that their work may make an efficacious contribution to the integral formation of future priests.

77. Where lay faithful are involved in teaching in seminaries, in the sense indicated above in n. 20, it becomes necessary to provide for

<sup>60</sup> *Ratio fundamentalis*, n. 34; Congregation for Catholic Education, *The Theological Formation of Future Priests* (22 February 1976), n. 118; Code of Canon Law 253, §1.

their appropriate religious and apostolic formation, so that their work may be in complete conformity with the ends proper to priestly formation.

78. Greater use should be made of the numerous universities and pontifical institutions of formation in Rome for the preparation of educators, as has already been opportunely suggested by the *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*.<sup>61</sup> In this regard, those nations who for various reasons cannot establish their own institutions will find in those centers substantial help, above all with regard to the pedagogical preparation of the future educators.

79. While recognizing the precious contribution which various existing Congregations and Priestly Societies are providing in the training of formational personnel, new initiatives for the sanctification of the clergy and for priestly formation, which God's grace gives rise to in the Church, should be followed with sympathy and openness and should be given the benefits of help and the necessary discernment.<sup>62</sup>

## **2. More reasonable planning and distribution of the educators in seminaries**

80. Since the efficiency of the community of educators in seminaries greatly depends upon its stability, necessary changes of personnel should be planned ahead of time, so as to be able to program appropriate substitutions when needed.

Good programming, above all of the teachings personnel, is necessary where the system of so-called sabbatical years or semesters is in use, so that all the fields of instruction remain adequately active even during the absence of individual teachers.

81. While efforts will be made to correct the present scarcity of educators by means of a better preparation of the same, a more appropriate planning and distribution should also be considered. Above all there is a pressing need to regulate the proliferation of major seminaries, or avoid the breaking up into small units of those

<sup>61</sup> N. 85.

<sup>62</sup> Code of Canon Law 605.

already in existence. Given the scarcity of personnel, the call for a reasonable concentration of material needs and of personnel by means of the creation of interdiocesan (national, regional, provincial) seminaries should be given more consideration.<sup>63</sup>

82. Furthermore, the need for an "exchange of gifts" among sister Churches, as John Paul II has insisted over and over again, demands that the dioceses richer in educators of the clergy should be willing to help those that are poorer. According to *Pastores dabo vobis*, the candidate for the priesthood "should prepare himself for ministry which may mean in practice that his readiness to follow the indications of the Holy Spirit and of his Bishop will lead him to be sent to preach the Gospel even beyond the frontiers of his own country,"<sup>64</sup> and therefore also to put himself at the disposition of some seminary. In such cases, "those priests who seek to work in a nation new to them should take care not only to know well the language of that place but also the psychological and social characteristics peculiar to the people they wish to serve in humility."<sup>65</sup>

To this end, the institution by the Holy See of the Permanent Interdicasterial Commission for a more equitable, distribution of priests in the world deserves mention. This commission has as its main goal the favoring of the interchange of seminary educators and vocations directors.

## Conclusion

83. The present document, which the Congregation for Catholic Education places before the most reverend Bishops and seminary educators, has been written with a view towards facilitating a faithful application of the suggestions given in 1990 by the Synod of Bishops. These suggestions were taken into account in the Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* of Pope John Paul II. Indeed a careful professional preparation of educational teams, the promotion of

<sup>63</sup> Code of Canon Law 237 §2; however, the diocesan Seminary is always the ideal in those situations where it can function regularly and decorously, "ubi id fieri possit atque expediat," as can. 237 itself expresses in the first paragraph.

<sup>64</sup> N. 59.

<sup>65</sup> PO, n. 10.

which is being sought, constitutes an indispensable presupposition for the realization of the aims proper to that synodal assembly. These consist in the creation of conditions in seminaries such as to be able to give to the Church true shepherds of souls, sensitive to the present spiritual needs. It is clear that only well chosen educators, expert in the art of pedagogy, will be able to form priests who will have those spiritual, intellectual, and human qualities which everyone cherishes and which have been pointed out in such great detail in the postsynodal Exhortation.

It was for this reason then that there was a desire to underscore some particular doctrinal, pedagogical, and organizational requirements on this subject. These are requirements of which, to a great extent, the Most Reverend Bishops are aware as well and which they seek to satisfy, overcoming, at times, many difficulties. In the present circumstances, however, as the Synod has shown, these obligations have a great urgency and must be faced with greater courage, with a more decisive will, and with more adequate means. It is hoped that in this regard those elements found to be lacking will be supplied and that all those who are responsible in this area will work to promote programs and initiatives capable of effecting further progress. It is, therefore, our strong common desire that the present positive experiences in various dioceses will be confirmed, strengthened, and extended to the whole Church in a spirit of mutual solidarity and collaboration.

Rome, given at the Offices of the Congregations, 4 November 1993, Feast of Saint Charles Borromeo, Patron of Seminaries.

Cardinal Pio Laghi  
*Prefect*

+ Jose Saraiva Martins  
Titular Archbishop of Tuburnica  
*Secretary*

## Cases and Inquiries

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Excelso García, O.P.

### IMPERFECT CIVIL DIVORCE "TOLERATED"

*I have just arrived from Spain. Since no English version of the new Catholic Catechism was yet available here in the Philippines, I bought a copy of the Spanish version. I have read only some portions. I am very much surprised at what it says about divorce. The second paragraph of number 2383 reads as follows: "If the civil divorce is the only possible way to guarantee certain legitimate rights, the care of children or the insurance of patrimony, it can be tolerated without it being a moral evil." I have always thought that civil divorce was an evil, as contrary to the indissolubility of marriage. I have never read a statement like this before. I am more surprised to find it in the official Catechism of the Catholic Church. Is it that our own Church is changing her teaching in so important issue? I beg your kindness to enlighten me on this matter, because I am really confused now. If you think it can be published in the Boletín, you may do it. Perhaps others might be as confused as myself.*

A Priest

*Notion and division.* Divorce is the act of putting an end to a marriage by law, allowing both husband and wife to marry again. The so-called *civil divorce* is two-fold, namely: perfect and imperfect. *Perfect* divorce attempts to nullify a valid marriage, giving the parties the option to contract a new civil marriage. *Imperfect* divorce, however, allows only the spouses to live separately, leaving intact the marriage bond. Rights and obligations that owe their origin to the civil law, like those concerning heritage disappear with the imperfect divorce. Parental obligations to legitimate children flowing from

natural law, however, remain intact. *Imperfect* divorce is also called *separation from bed, board and cohabitation*.

*Canonical marriage and civil law.* There are some countries where the marriage celebrated in the Church is considered as valid by the Civil Code, provided that certain requirements are fulfilled, such as the power to celebrate marriage in the person solemnizing it, the marriage license and the registration of the celebrated marriage in the civil register. These requirements having been fulfilled, a canonical marriage enjoys all civil effects accorded by the Civil Code to marriages of other citizens solemnized by a civil official.

Unfortunately it is not infrequent to find Catholics married according to the Church's law and enjoying the benefits of all civil effects, who refuse to submit to the Church's matrimonial tribunal their marital problems for a peaceful solution. They prefer, for reasons of their own, to submit their case to the civil court. Moreover, in some instances they seek from the civil power *perfect* divorce, which they wrongly believe would give them a chance to contract a new valid marriage. This attitude renders their situation more difficult from the moral view point.

*Only imperfect civil divorce is "tolerated".* The confusion of our consultant could be resolved by carefully reading the first paragraph of number 2383 of the new *Catechism*. It reads as follows: "*Separation*, still subsisting the matrimonial bond, can be legitimate in certain cases, as foreseen in the Code of Canon Law (cf. CIC, cc. 1151-1155)." It is clear that the second paragraph of number 2383, cited earlier, deals with the same "*separation* of spouses, still subsisting the matrimonial bond," dealt with in the previous paragraph.

The new *Catechism* deals with divorce in Part IV, Section II, Article 6. In number 2382 it reaffirms the doctrine on the two essential properties of marriage, namely unity and indissolubility. Number 2383 states clearly that in certain cases the spouses might need, due to some marital differences, to live separately, keeping intact the marriage bond, which can be done by following the Church's norms. Here it is also stated that civil divorce (*separation*) requested by the spouses can be tolerated without any moral guilt, when certain legitimate rights are ensured, the children's maintenance and upbringing are provided for, or the patrimony is safe-

guarded. In number 2384 perfect divorce is clearly disapproved, as contrary to natural law. Any Catholic person, validly married, who remarries by virtue of civil divorce, should know that he is living in public and permanent adultery. Number 2385 points out the evil effects caused by divorce in the family and in human society. It causes irreparable damage to the innocent spouse and to the children. Divorce is truly a social evil. Finally, number 2386 marks the difference existing between the responsibility of the spouse who has tried his/her best to save the matrimonial union and that of the spouse who is the cause of the failure of a valid marriage.

*An old and most difficult topic debated.* Going back to the topic of number 2383 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* we can say that it has been called by old theologians and canonists as an "*intricatissimum*" topic. It has been long debated whether it was lawful or not for a Catholic judge to pronounce a sentence of (imperfect) divorce, by applying an unjust law which establishes divorce; in other words, whether the act of pronouncing a sentence of (imperfect) divorce according to existing laws is an act intrinsically evil or not? If such an act is intrinsically evil, no Christian judge may be justified in pronouncing a sentence in favor of divorce. If, however, it is not intrinsically evil, there can exist some serious and grave reasons justifying his sentence in favor of divorce.

*The Church's attitude.* Undoubtedly the granting of a civil divorce has been found to be so evil in itself and its harmful effects have been felt so deeply on the morals of the consorts, the children and the States involved, that it has never been considered licit for Catholics to seek civil divorce from civil tribunals. On several occasions various Bishops have submitted cases to the Holy See requesting permission for Catholics to seek an imperfect civil divorce. In all cases the petitioners were instead granted by the Church a permanent separation from his/her spouse on the ground of the sole canonical reason, namely adultery, on condition that the Catholic petitioner had beforehand solemnly promised that he/she would never attempt another union while his/her true spouse still lived.

A question was raised on August 6, 1906 to the Holy Office, asking whether a woman could be permitted to seek a civil divorce "for very serious reasons." The answer of the Holy Office was: "Considering the peculiar circumstances of the case, it can be *allowed* on

condition that the petitioner will declare before the Ordinary or before his delegate and two witnesses that she will not attempt to break the marriage bond, but will only use the favorable sentence to get free from the civil effects and scandal be removed, as the Bishop may deem it proper" (Cfr. Gasparri, *De Matrimonio*, 1932, II, n. 1324). It seems that this norm has been followed by the Holy See since 1906.

*Pius XII.* It was Pius XII who, in his address to the Association of Catholic Jurists on November 6, 1946, said: "We want to avail of this opportunity to enlighten the conscience of Catholic Jurists, thus we formulate the two following basic norms:

"1. To pronounce a judicial sentence the following principle is valid: a judge cannot feel himself free from responsibility in giving the sentence only for the simple reason that the whole responsibility rests upon the law and the legislators. Undoubtedly these are the ones mainly responsible for the effects caused by the application of the law they have approved. However, the judge, who in his sentence applies the law to particular cases, is an accomplice, hence a collaborator and co-responsible person, for the effects that will follow the application of such law."

"2. A judge can never bind anybody to put an act intrinsically evil, i.e. which by its very nature is contrary to the law of God or of the Church... In particular, a Catholic judge may not, unless serious and really grave reasons exist, pronounce a sentence of civil divorce, where divorce exists, concerning a marriage which is valid before God and before the Church. He should remember that such a sentence does not merely nullify civil effects. It does also effectively cause the erroneous belief that the existing matrimonial bond be considered as dissolved and a new marriage be contracted and regarded as valid and binding."

*Fr. Bender's interpretation.* The foregoing words of Pius XII give the answer to the old debated question on the morality of a sentence pronounced in favor of divorce, according to Bender in his *Praelectiones Iuris Matrimonii*, 1950, p. 558. "If Pius XII said that 'a Catholic judge may not, unless serious and very grave reasons exist, pronounce a sentence of civil divorce,' therefore," Bender says, "there are cases when a Catholic judge may pronounce such sentence. Hence, such an act is not an act intrinsically evil, which may not become consistent with reason."



Pius XII did not specify the reasons why the act of pronouncing the judicial sentence in favor of divorce is not intrinsically evil. He, exercising his supreme magisterium in the Church, proposed the norm or guideline to be followed by a Catholic judge: "We want to enlighten the conscience of Catholic jurists, so we formulate the two following basic norms." It belongs to the theologians and canonists to find reasons which can support this pontifical norm, bearing always in mind that a valid marriage is by natural and divine law indissoluble.

Pius XII said that a Catholic judge "should remember that a sentence of divorce does not merely nullify civil effects. It does also effectively cause the erroneous belief that the existing matrimonial bond be considered as dissolved and a new marriage be contracted and regarded as valid and binding." These words should be interpreted properly. No doubt that the intention of a Catholic judge can and should be restricted to nullify civil effects only. But that is not enough. All natural effects of marriage should unmistakably be kept intact. The judicial sentence for imperfect civil divorce should not be the cause of the erroneous belief that the existing matrimonial bond is broken and it can therefore be considered as dissolved and a new marriage be contracted and regarded as valid and binding. Since these effects caused by the sentence itself are serious and very grave, "a serious and very grave reason" is required to tolerate that a Catholic judge may pronounce a sentence for civil divorce, i.e. for imperfect civil divorce, of course.

*The real solution.* The question still to be resolved is: how a judicial sentence applying an existing law whose purpose is to nullify not only the civil effects but also the marital bond and other natural effects (rights and obligations), can be considered as an act which nullifies civil effects only? Bender holds that the answer should be found in considering the act itself, i.e. in the pronouncement of the sentence. The judge, he says, is an instrument of the legislator, not blind but intelligent instrument, since the sentence is an act of his mind. The judge can apply to each concrete case the whole or only part of the law, as divine law allows him to do. Thus, the judge, being an intelligent instrument of the legislator can make a distinction among the effects intended by the law. On this intellectual process of making this distinction among the effects of the law rests the judge's possibility of including only the merely civil effects in the

judicial sentence, without touching the marital bond and other natural effects, that are beyond the power of any human legislator.

This way of proceeding is not contrary to a judge's oath, since it conforms to divine law. He applies the existing law as far as it can be applied, i.e. in full conformity to divine law. The legislators should not thereby feel being cheated and betrayed, since they know or should know that the Catholic judge must act as his conscience requires, and that he has accepted his office on this condition.

*Guidelines.* By way of guidelines for the persons concerned, we deem it proper to state the following:

*Catholic spouses.* Married Catholic couples may not seek a civil divorce, while the bond of their valid marriage still binds them. Only after the marriage in question has been declared null and void, according to the Church's law, or after it has been dissolved by the Holy See, or by using the Pauline Privilege, may a permission to seek a civil divorce be granted by the local Ordinary under any of the following conditions, namely:

1. that the Catholic spouse cannot obtain the protection of his rights in any other way;
2. that the Catholic party has already obtained an ecclesiastical decree of *permanent* separation, due to an adultery of the other spouse (c. 1152, § 3);
3. that there is a cause of public and supernatural order, proportionate to the evil caused by civil divorce, such as the rescue of children from the custody of a non-Catholic or unworthy parent;
4. that the Catholic who wants to seek a civil divorce has to declare before the Ordinary or his delegate and two witnesses that he/she does not recognize the authority of the State to dissolve the bond of marriage and that he/she is seeking divorce only for the civil effects to which he/she has a right;
5. that the Catholic who wants to seek a civil divorce solemnly promises that he/she will not attempt another marriage while his/her spouse is still alive;
6. that no scandal will arise following the granting of permission to seek to civil divorce.

*Catholic lawyers.* A Catholic lawyer, being the juridical alternate ego of the person whom he represents, should be familiar with what has been said above regarding Catholics who want to seek a civil divorce. When the client is a Catholic who has already obtained permission from the local Ordinary to seek civil divorce, the Catholic lawyer does not need permission from the Ordinary to represent him in the civil court. The exhibition of the permission by the client is enough. However, when the Catholic lawyer is to represent a non-Catholic client in seeking civil divorce, he needs to obtain also the Ordinary's permission.

The norm to follow by the Catholic lawyer is: if it is lawful and moral for the client to seek a divorce, it is lawful and moral for the lawyer to act in his behalf. When it is not lawful and moral for the client to seek the civil divorce, a Catholic lawyer may not formally cooperate with him. He cannot approve of his evil action.

A Catholic lawyer has to bear clearly in mind the difference between *perfect* and *imperfect* divorce. When the client, Catholic or non-Catholic, is seeking *perfect divorce* as he wants to dissolve the marriage bond, the Catholic lawyer may not cooperate with him *formally*, because his action will be also immoral and evil. He must try to dissuade him by all possible ways from his desire to dissolve his marriage, as contrary to the natural and divine positive laws. The State cannot really dissolve the bond of any valid marriage through a judicial sentence of divorce. Besides there must exist a proportionate grave reason of the public or supernatural order requiring the Catholic civil lawyer to act. Likewise, no scandal should be caused by the Catholic lawyer's participation in such cases.

It should be noted, however, that the Holy See has declared that "it can be *tolerated* that a Catholic lawyer act in behalf of the defendant in opposing the petition of his spouse seeking a perfect civil divorce" (Cf. S.C. of the Holy Office, May 22, 1860, cited by Gasparri, *De Matrimonio*, II, 1932, n. 1312).

A Catholic lawyer should also remember what Pope Leo XIII said: "It is not lawful to follow one line of conduct in private and another in public, respecting privately the authority of the Church but publicly rejecting it" (Encycl. *Immortale Dei*, Nov. 1, 1885).

*Catholic judges.* A Catholic judge may apply the existing law of divorce when the marriage of the petitioner seeking divorce has already been declared canonically null and void by the Church's tribunal, or when it has been dissolved by the Holy See or by using the Pauline Privilege. In these cases, the judge is not attempting to break the already inexistent bond of marriage, thus he does not violate the divine law.

When the plaintiff seeking the civil divorce is still validly married, a Catholic judge may not formally cooperate with him granting the petitioned divorce. Hence he cannot approve of the evil action, rather he should do everything possible to dissuade the plaintiff from instituting this action; he should explain to him that civil divorce does not really dissolve the marriage bond but merely frees him from civil effects. In short, a Catholic judge should openly profess his faith in each individual case.

To act on a petition for civil divorce there must be very grave reason of public and supernatural order, proportionate to the evil consequences of divorce. In the case of a Catholic judge, this proportionate grave reason is almost always present. For if all Catholic judges were forced to resign their posts or were advised not to accept judicial office, a grave and public harm would be done to both the Church and the State (Cf. Gasparri, *De Matrimonio*, II, 1932, 1311).

The same conduct should be observed by a Catholic judge when the parties seeking civil divorce are not Catholics, if they are validly married. The State is incompetent to dissolve any valid marriage.

*Catholic priests.* The first obligation of Catholic priests in this matter would be to coordinate with their respective Ordinaries in giving the people of God the same information: that no married Catholic faithful may seek a civil divorce without permission from the Holy See or from the local Ordinary. To seek a civil divorce, even if only for the civil effects, without such permission should be considered as a mortal sin.

Besides, Catholic priests should also instruct the Catholic lawyers and judges of their respective obligations in this matter.

Needless to say that they should also do whatever they can so that civil legislation may become more in conformity with the Church's law.

*Local Ordinary.* The local Hierarchy should adopt a uniform and strict discipline on this matter. A local Ordinary may permit a validly married Catholic faithful to seek civil divorce:

- a. when his marriage has already been declared null and void according to the Church's law;
- b. when his marriage has been dissolved by the Holy See;
- c. when his marriage has been dissolved by the Pauline Privilege.

In giving such permission the local Ordinary should make it clear that its purpose is only to free the children from the custody of a non-Catholic or unworthy parent; or to protect the property of the Catholic party seeking the divorce against a person who is not really his spouse or who is no longer his spouse; to assure civil recognition of any future marriage the Catholic party may enter into; or to avoid the danger of the Catholic party being charged with bigamy under the civil law, if he would enter into another marriage which he now has the right to do.

## FACULTY TO REMIT CENSURES AND TO HEAR CONFESSIONS

*I was assigned to the Philippines by my Superior two years ago. I am carrying on my ministry as a Hospital Chaplain. In my country, I was granted by the local Ordinary the Faculty to remit those censures that can be remitted by the local Ordinaries. May I ask you whether such faculty is also valid for the Philippines, as it happens with the faculty to hear confessions, which is valid everywhere?*

*A Religious Priest*

Our answer to the proposed question is in the negative: the faculty granted in his own country to our consultant by his previous local Ordinary to remit censures is not valid here in the Philippines. The local Ordinary may not delegate this faculty to be exercised outside the territory of his jurisdiction.

As I can gather from the explanation of our consultant, he has no clear idea of the validity of the faculty to hear confessions given by

the local Ordinary. He assumes that this faculty can always be used everywhere. A distinction is in order in this respect, namely:

1. The faculty to hear confessions granted to a priest, secular or religious, by the local Ordinary can be exercised everywhere, as long as the priest concerned received the faculty in a *habitual* manner, and remains *incardinated* or *has his residence* (domicile) in the diocese of the local Ordinary who granted him the faculty. Canon 967, § 2 states: "Those who have the faculty *habitually* to hear Confessions, whether by virtue of their office or *by virtue of a concession by the Ordinary of either the place of incardination or that in which they have a domicile*, can exercise that faculty everywhere, unless in a particular case the local Ordinary has refused, without prejudice to the provisions of can. 974, § § 2 and 3."

2. The faculty, however, to hear confessions, granted to a priest, secular or religious, by the local Ordinary *per modum actus only* cannot be exercised everywhere; nor can the faculty received in a *habitual manner* be exercised everywhere when the priest *does not remain incardinated* or *does not keep his residence* (domicile) in the diocese of the local Ordinary who granted him the faculty. Canon 975 reads: "Apart from revocation, *the faculty mentioned in can. 967 § 2, ceases by loss of office, by excommunication, or by loss of domicile.*"

Our consultant being a religious priest, lost his domicile when he was assigned by his Superior to the Philippines. Canon 103 says: "Members of religious institutes and of societies of apostolic life acquire a domicile in the place where the house to which they belong is situated." With the loss of his domicile in the diocese of the local Ordinary who granted him the faculty to hear confessions, the religious priest lost the faculty to hear confessions (canon 975), and consequently the faculty to hear confessions everywhere (canon 967, § 2). The extension of the faculty to hear confessions everywhere is based on the existence of the faculty to hear confessions in the diocese of the local Ordinary who granted the faculty. Having this faculty ceased, there is no basis to talk about its extension.

However, our consultant should bear in mind what canon 566 prescribes with regard to the faculties which a Hospital Chaplain enjoys: "§ 1. A chaplain must be given all the faculties which due pastoral care demands. Besides those which are given by particular

law or by special delegation, *a chaplain has by virtue of his office the faculty to hear the Confessions of the faithful entrusted to his care, to preach to them the Word of God, to administer Viaticum and the Anointing of the sick, and to confer the sacrament of Confirmation when they are in danger of death.*"

"§ 2. In hospitals and prisons and on sea voyages, a chaplain has the further faculty, to be exercised only in those places, to absolve from *latae sententiae* censures which are neither reserved nor declared, without prejudice to can. 976."

These faculties are given by the law itself *vi officii*. It is to be understood that our consultant has been appointed as chaplain by the local Ordinary in accordance with can. 565, which reads: "Unless the law provides otherwise or unless special rights lawfully belong to someone, *a chaplain is appointed by the local Ordinary*, to whom also it belongs to appoint one who has been presented or to confirm one elected."

## **Festal Homilies for May and June 1994**

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*Regino Cortés, O.P.*

### **FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER**

**May 1, 1994**

**FIRST READING: Acts 9:26-31**

This first visit of St. Paul to Jerusalem after his conversion as recorded in the Acts has to be complimented with what St. Paul himself wrote in Galatians 2:18-24 and 2 Corinthians 11:32-33. It is in Galatians where we learned that after his conversion he left for Arabia (v. 17), probably the Arabian desert south of Damascus. This is not mentioned in the Acts. It is not known how long was his stay in "Arabia," but it was only after three years from his conversion that he returned to Jerusalem "to visit Cephas (Peter)" definitely the recognized head of the apostles. This was after his escape from Damascus given both in Acts (9:23-25) and 2 Corinthians (11:32-33).

If we place the conversion of St. Paul in the year 36/37 A.D., which seems to be a most probable date since the persecution of the Christians ushered by the martyrdom of St. Stephen could only have happened after the death of Pilate in 36 A.D., then this first visit to Jerusalem by St. Paul after his conversion was probably in the year 39 A.D. During this time the "church was at peace." The phrase: "enjoyed the increased consolation of the Holy Spirit," may also be translated: "it grew through the encouragement or help of the Holy Spirit." The growth of the Church like a mustard seed is here suggested.

Not knowing St. Paul very well and the facts of his conversion the Christians of Jerusalem were afraid of him but Barnabas took



charge and introduced Paul to them. Acts says that it was Barnabas who presented Paul to the apostles without naming who these apostles were. Galatians only mentioned Peter and James (Gal 1:19). It is not however clear in Greek followed by the Vulgate whether it was Barnabas or Paul himself who told the story of his conversion. Our liturgical text and other modern translations give the impression that it was Barnabas who did all the reporting. The King James Version (KJV) is non-committal but inclines towards Barnabas as the narrator.

## SECOND READING: 1 John 3:18-24

Chapter 3 of the First Letter of St. John speaks of Christians as God's children who, therefore, must break away with sin and must keep the commandments especially the commandment of love. The love of a Christian must not only be in words but "in deed and in truth."

"Committed to the truth," is an Old Testament concept which implies faithfulness to Yahweh, living according to the will of Yahweh. The opposition between "truth and lie" is given in 2:21-24 of this same letter.

There are two textual difficulties in verses 19 and 20 which can be observed by comparing the translations of our liturgical text and the King James Version. KJV translates: "And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall *assure* our hearts before him. *For if* our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Our liturgical text has: "This is our way of knowing we are committed to the truth and *are at peace* before him *no matter what* our consciences may charge us with, *for* God is greater than our hearts and all is known to him."

The first difficulty is not formidable. It involves the translation of the verb *peisomen* (from *peitho*) which our liturgical text translates "we are at peace," while the King James Version (KJV) has "assure." Literally it means "to induce somebody to believe in something," or also "to placate." Hence the Vulgate translates it as *persuadebimus*.

Verse 20 is more problematic since the two phrases which make up the verse are introduced by the word *hoti* a causal particle

translated as "because," "since," "for." If the two *hoti*'s are retained the translation would be non-sensical as may be seen by taking the KJV translation and adding this particle: "for (*hoti*) if (*ean*) our heart condemn us, because (*hoti*) God is greater than our heart,..." That is why the second *hoti* is omitted in the KJV translation and also in the Vulgate followed by the Douay-Rheims version. But all the principal manuscripts have this particle so it could not easily be omitted that is why it is retained by many other versions like the Jerusalem Bible, the New American Bible and our liturgical text. However the first *hoti* with *ean* is broken down as *ho ti an* (as in Jn 2:5; 14:13; 1 Jn 3:22) which becomes a relative pronoun meaning "whatever" as in the JB and translated in our liturgical text as "no matter what" appending it to the previous sentence. KJV, the Vulgate and Douay-Rheims makes v. 20 an independent sentence.

St. John emphasizes that we remain in Christ and Christ remains in us when we keep his commandments which are summarized thus: "we are to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ and are to love one another as he commanded us" (v. 23).

#### GOSPEL READING: *John 15:1-8*

The study of the "history of redaction" of biblical texts is making a headway in our times. No doubt it has aided in a greater understanding of the sacred texts but some uninitiated to this study are becoming a prey to confusion. It is now presented, for instance, that chapters 15-17 of St. John's Gospel have taken shape in the 90's among the Johannine community at Ephesus, not necessarily from St. John the Apostle. This community suffered a schism during the last part of the first century. According to the *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (NJBC, p. 946) "some scholars trace echoes of that schism back into the Gospel (e.g., in the exhortation to remain on the vine in 15:1-17)." Yet, whatever be the origin of this text, its canonical character cannot be doubted.

The use of the vine as a biblical image is frequent in the Old Testament: Isaiah 5:1 ff.; Jer 2:21; 5:10; Ez 15:1-8; 17:5-10; 19:10-14; Hos 10:1 ff.; Ps 80:9-17. In these texts, however, the reference is mostly to a rebellious people. As an image referring to the Messiah there is no echo in the Old Testament but in an apocryphal book called

the *Apocalypse of Baruch*, 39:7. But in the Gospel of St. John the use of the word "true" with an Old Testament image referring to Jesus replaces and perfects the reality of that image.

Pruning unfruitful branches is also found in the Old Testament imagery (Jer 5:10) in order that they would bear much fruit. In some texts these "fruits" are the results of missionary activities but here it could be "a life of obedience to the commandments, especially that of love, vv. 12-17" (footnote Jerusalem Bible: JB).

The word *katharoi* in verse 3 can either be translated as "pruned" (NAB, JB) or "clean" (KJV and in our liturgical text). Another word variously translated is that of *genesthe* in verse 8 which is literally interpreted by the JB and KJV in the future tense: "*you will be my disciple.*" It implies that becoming a disciple (perhaps in a more perfect stage) is hinged in bearing much fruit. In our liturgical text and in the New American Bible (NAB) it is in bearing fruit and becoming Christ's disciples that the Father is glorified.

## HOMILY

It is very tragic but even during the first years of Christianity schism was already experienced in the Church. Not only individuals but groups separate themselves from the true vine. This is verified in every age and in every generation. We read in the second letter of Peter (2:1): "As there were false prophets in the past history of our people, so you too will have your false teachers, who will insinuate their own disruptive views and disown the Master who purchased their freedom."

Not only were there false prophets in the Old Testament, there was in fact the rending of the kingdom after the death of Solomon in 931 B.C., the northern kingdom separating from the Davidic dynasty of the south. But it was to David that God made the solemn promise of a perpetual kingship (2 Samuel 7; Psalm 89). History is the witness of what happened to the northern kingdom. In the southern kingdom the sole Davidic dynasty remained in spite of many adversities, but in the north nine dynasties succeeded one after the other in the space of 200 years until the kingdom itself was destroyed in 721 B.C. by the Assyrians never to rise again. The fate of the southern kingdom under

the Davidic banner was firmly established with the coming of the messianic king as announced by the angel Gabriel to Mary: "The Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David; he will rule over the House of Jacob for ever and his reign will have no end" (Lk 1:32-33).

So will the fate be of those who separate themselves from the true vine. After breaking-up with the Catholic Church the so-called Eastern Churches stopped producing saints, at least they dare not proclaim, as the Catholic Church has always done through the canonization process, the sainthood of their members.

## SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

May 8, 1994

FIRST READING: *Acts of the Apostles, 10:25-26,34-35,44-48*

The episode in today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles is of great significance in the history of salvation. For the first time gentiles or pagans in the person of the Centurion Cornelius together with his household were baptized without circumcision or embracing beforehand the Jewish religion. Before this event only those who were already circumcised either Jews or proselytes (non-Jews who embraced the Jewish religion as that eunuch from Ethiopia in Acts 8:24-40) could be baptized. This started the definitive break of Christianity from the Jewish religion which, according to Acts, was inspired by the Holy Spirit and carried out by St. Peter. It was to the conversion of the gentiles later on that St. Paul dedicated his whole missionary activities. The great issue debated at the Council of Jerusalem concerning the baptism of gentiles without circumcision was an offshoot of this action of St. Peter baptizing Cornelius and his household and the first missionary journey of St. Paul and St. Barnabas converting so many gentiles to Christianity (Acts 15).

In this episode we read that Cornelius and the members of his household already received the Holy Spirit with manifestations also present during Pentecost even before their baptism with water (vv. 44-48). This clearly shows that baptism with water is just the external

sign of the sacrament. One who desires baptism may already be in the state of grace even before the external rite of pouring water is performed.

## SECOND READING: 1 John 4:7-10

We find in these lines of First John the most sublime definition that *God is love*. It was St. Augustine who wrote: "What more can I say brothers? If in praising love nothing more is said in all the other pages of this epistle, if nothing is absolutely said in the other pages of Scripture and only hear this word from the mouth of the Holy Spirit that *God is love*, we should look for nothing more" (*In Epist. I Ioannis* PL 35,2031).

In this reading of four verses alone the word *love* in its noun and verb form is found 8 times. No doubt the centrality of this concept in St. John is well manifested here. To love is not only an obligation for a Christian. It is part of his nature being "begotten of God."

Love and the knowledge of God are intimately united. "The man without love has known nothing of God" (v. 8). But the love of a Christian is more of an echo or participation of the mutual love of the Father and the Son in the bosom of the Trinity manifested by the Father's sending his Son to the world "that we might have life through him" (v.9).

The idea that the love of God for us is responsible for sending his Son as our expiation (*hilasmos*) or "offering for our sins" is clear in the concluding verse. This is also expressed by St. Paul in Romans 5:8: "what proves that God loves us is that Christ died for us while we were still sinners." However it must not be construed that Christ's expiation or his death on the cross exhausts the total mystery of redemption for as St. Paul teaches Christ's death was only the necessary condition for his resurrection, the source of our spiritual life. This life in the risen and glorified Christ, shared in baptism and given by the Holy Spirit, is a life in the love of God which is perfected in the resurrection of the dead and also perfects the divine sonship in the Christian.

## GOSPEL READING: *John 15:9-17*

In the Gospel of John the relationship between the Father and the Son is expressed oftentimes as "love" (Jn 3:35: "The Father loves the Son and has entrusted everything to him"; 5:20: "For the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he does himself,..."; 17:24: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, so that they may always see the glory you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world."). This love therefore is not understood in the moral sense but in an essential sense which is the communication of divine nature between the Father and the Son.

This is not the kind of love expressed in 15:9 ff. This love of the Father for the Son which Christ also communicates to his disciples is in the moral sense and consists in obedience. This is expressed in Jn 14:31: "the world must be brought to know that I love the Father and that am doing exactly what the Father told me"; also in 10:17: "The Father loves me, because I lay down my life in order to take it up again." If we want then to remain in the love of Christ we must obey his commandment of "loving one another as he has loved us (v. 12).

Yet this love which is expressed by obedience to Christ's commandments results in joy, the happiness of belonging to God's kingdom. For Christ considers his disciples not anymore as slaves but as friends since slaves do not participate in the intimate joy of the master.

Christ chose his disciples "to go forth and bear fruit." This does not exactly mean the apostolic commission which will happen later at the resurrection in 20:21 but the same general meaning of bearing fruit in 15:4,8, fruits of a morally well-lived Christian life. It is only after bearing such fruits of eternal life that we can ask the Father in Christ's name of things which he will give to us.

## HOMILY

How many of us can sincerely say that we obey the laws of the land because we love our country? The truth rather is that many just obey the laws because of their love for themselves. If one can get away with it then who cares if traffic laws are violated, taxes are not paid,

garbage are thrown on esteros, trees are illegally cut, cars and people are nabbed. But in the final analysis, disobeying the laws of the land, transgressing the commandments, will cause more harm to the individual concerned rather than benefit.

Those who disobey traffic laws may someday find themselves in hospitals losing a leg or two, or worse, brought straight to their graves. Those who do not pay their taxes may see their names someday listed among the tax-evaders; indiscriminate garbage throwers may suddenly be victims of floods due to plugged esteros; carnappers and people-nappers may just find themselves in jail. But until then who cares?

Yet it is only in keeping the Father's commandment that our joy will be complete and it is the same joy which Christ our Lord himself possesses. Whoever would not want to possess this joy which is permanent and eternal is to be considered insane. Still many think that the commandments of God are burdensome and a threat to their unbridled liberty. This reminds me of a parable from the late Archbishop Fulton Sheen.

On one island surrounded by cliffs plunging into the sea was a settlement protected by walls. Safe inside these walls the people were free to walk around, children play and dance, everybody was happy. Then one day some libertinists came preaching a false sense of liberty and persuaded them to destroy the walls because they curtail their freedom. Now they people are afraid to walk around, the children and afraid to play, are afraid to dance, are afraid of falling into the sea.

## **ASCENSION OF THE LORD**

**May 15, 1994**

**FIRST READING: *Acts, 1:1-11***

This prologue to Acts clearly indicates the continuation of St. Luke's gospel. It links the subject matter of the gospel concerning the words and deeds of Jesus and the time of the Church to be lived by the witnesses of Jesus "not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and

Samaria, and indeed to the ends of the earth" (v. 8). They witnessed that Jesus was "alive after his Passion" (v. 3), a most important aspect of the Christian kerygma as, for instance, expressed in Romans 14:9: "...Christ both died and came to life, it was so that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living."

*Synalidsomenos* in v. 4 is variously translated. NAB has: "while meeting with them," and KJV: "And being assembled together with them"; This is also the interpretation in our liturgical text: "On one occasion when he met with them." JB, on the other hand, translates: "When he had been at table with with them," taking the etymology of the verb from *syn-alos* ("salt together"). The connection, however, with a eucharistic meal is far-fetched. It is more like the meal in Lk 24:42 differently from the breaking of the bread in 24:30.

Verses 6 onwards resumes the narrative of Luke 24:49. Two events are here to be distinguished. The coming of the Holy Spirit which the apostles must await to constitute them as Christ's witnesses and the second coming the time or date of which depends upon the decision of the Father.

The ending of the gospel of St. Luke (vv. 50-53) gives the impression that the ascension of Jesus happened at that evening after appearing to his apostles but the prologue of the Acts specifically mentions that Christ "appeared to them over the course of forty days" (v. 3). Nevertheless it is only in this narration in Acts where we find the time, place and manner of his ascension explicitly stated. We must, however, distinguish Christ's glorification by the Father in heaven which immediately happened after his resurrection and his bodily ascension which marked the end of his post-paschal appearances to his disciples and which, according to St. Luke, happened after forty days.

#### SECOND READING: *Ephesians, 1:17-23*

This prayer of St. Paul which he incorporated in this letter, traditionally known as the letter to the Ephesians, but could be also the letter he sent to the Laodiceans as mentioned in Colossians 4:16, contains rich doctrines about the triumph and supremacy of Christ. There are many linkages in this prayer with the letter to the



**Colossians:** Eph. 1:18/Col. 1:12; Eph. 1:20/Col. 2:10,12; Eph. 1:21/Col. 1:16; Eph. 1:22-23/Col. 1:18-19, implying that they were written at about the same time.

St. Paul prays that the "Ephesians" be given "a spirit of wisdom and insight (lit. *apokalypsis*: "manifestation of truth")," to know "him" (either referring to God the Father or to Christ). That God "enlighten their innermost vision (lit. "the eyes of their heart")," to know these three things: 1) the hope to which he has called them; 2) the richness of the glory to be inherited by the "saints" (*hagioi*: this term can either refer to the Christians as in Romans 1:7; 15:26,31; 1 Cor 16:1,15, etc. or to angels as in Mk 8:28; Lk 9:26; Acts 10:22; here it is not very clear but the liturgical text opted for the first meaning: "members of the church"); 3) the great magnitude of his power which he exercises for the believers. It is this same power which raised Christ from the dead, seated him at God's right hand (which includes his ascension) above other angelic hierarchies.

A new development in the imagery of the Church as Christ's body is presented in vv. 22-23. Christ is constituted head of the Church and his *pleroma* (fullness). Since the "fullness (*pleroma*) of divinity" is in the body of Christ (Col. 2:9), he assumes all dimensions of being: divine, human, cosmic. The Christian shares in this *pleroma* of Christ by being part of his body.

GOSPEL READING: *Mark 16:15-20*

Verses 9-20 of the last chapter of St. Mark is commonly known as its longer ending which most probably was added later on. But, though not authentically Markan, it is still considered canonical and is known to St. Irenaeus and Tatian in the second century. It is not, however, found in the Vatican and Sinaitic codices. The ending of the Gospel in verse 8 is definitely awkward that some biblical critics suspect an ending could have been lost. One manuscript in fact adds after v. 8 a short ending which, however, is not accepted as canonical: "*They reported briefly to Peter's companions what they had been told. Then Jesus himself through their agency broadcast from east to west the sacred and incorruptible message of eternal salvation.*"

The Freer Logion in *Codex Washingtonensis* (W) is a longer insertion in between verses 14 and 15 of our present text. It is named

after C.L. Freer who acquired the codex from Egypt in 1906. This is cited in the footnote of the Jerusalem Bible. This is also not canonical.

Mark 16:9-20, to all appearances, is a summary of the post-paschal appearances of the risen Christ taken from the other evangelists, Matthew, Luke and John concluding with the ascension and his sitting at the right hand of God. It is remarkable what the author mentioned about the miracles which accompanied the preaching of the gospel everywhere.

## HOMILY

From the time Christ the Lord expressed his mandate to his disciples to go forth and preach the Good News to all creation (in Mark) or to all nations (in Matthew) the Church has not stopped precisely doing these and accompanying it with signs or miracles as Jesus himself promised. St. Peter and St. John, in the name of Jesus, cured the lame man by birth who used to beg alms at the Temple gate (Acts 3:1-10); Paul healed a cripple at Lystra (Acts 14:8 ff.), raised to life Eutychus (Acts 20:10); unharmed by a viper in Malta (Acts 28:3-6). Miracles performed by Christ's disciples from the first years of Christianity until our time will fill hundreds of volumes. The history of the growth of the Church itself is a miracle. The permanency of the papacy, as kingdoms have fallen one by one, is a miracle.

Yet the Church should not glory on her past laurels. There are still more things to do to fulfill her salvific mission; more un-Christian lands to be evangelized; even Christian lands to be re-evangelized; Christian doctrines to be defended and proclaimed.

The Church cannot and must not hand over to any country, groups or organizations, like the United Nations, her unique role as the sacrament of salvation for all mankind. She can always ask the assistance of every person and all groups of good will for the fulfilment of her mission. Asia and Africa, where billions of people are not yet Christians, are fertile fields for the spread of the Gospel.

**PENTECOST SUNDAY**  
**May 22, 1944**

FIRST READING: *Acts 2:1-11*

What really happened during that Pentecost after the ascension of Jesus? The description of the way the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit in the Acts is now placed under rigid historical scrutiny. Thus the New Jerome Biblical Commentary (NJBC) evaluates: "Pentecost presses the question of the historical foundation of these episodes since neither the miracle of the tongues nor the chronological distance of the outpouring of the Spirit from Easter (cf. John 20:22!) is supported by any other NT author" (44:20 p. 730).

Research is being made among Jewish traditions which could have influenced the story either composed by St. Luke himself or taken by him from a pre-existent source. According to a Rabbinic source, *Pesachim*, 68b: "The Torah was given during the Feast of Weeks (*hag shavu'oth*)." This is Pentecost, also called Feast of the First-Fruits (*hag haqqatsir*) in Exodus 23:16. Hence the giving of the Law at Sinai and the feast of Pentecost were joined. The voice of God in Sinai, according to this Jewish tradition, was divided into 70 languages. Philo, a contemporary of Christ, has added details: "In the midst of the fire which came down from heaven a voice resounded which filled everyone with sacred terror, while the flame was changed into an articulate tongue which was known to the hearers" (*Spec. II par. 189*). This is compared to the likeness of tongues of fire in Acts 2:3.

Although the written sources of the linkage between the giving of the Law at Sinai and Pentecost seem to have been later than Acts the tradition could have been earlier. Still this Jewish influence cannot be definitely proven so that many authors think that the most probable basis of St. Luke's story would be the "actual mission experience" (NJBC, p. 731) of the apostles led by St. Peter on that Pentecost.

SECOND READING: *1 Corinthians, 12:3-7, 12-13*

The text in the liturgical reading is part of St. Paul's answer to the Corinthians concerning spiritual gifts which they had actually experienced. In spite of the varieties of these gifts they all come from the same Spirit. These gifts or *charismata* are given not for the good of the individual strictly speaking but for the good of the community.

The Christian community, the Church, is the body of Christ with many members but they are all unified by Christ and his Spirit. The members of this body transcend the frontiers of peoples "whether Jew or Greek," and social status, "whether slave or free."

It seems quite clear enough where St. Paul got this analogy between the body and the Christian community which makes up the Church. During his conversion Jesus identified himself with the Christians whom Paul persecuted. In Romans 8:11 he teaches that Christians are united in body with the risen Lord, through baptism (1 Cor 12:13; Rom 6:4) and through the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10:16).

GOSPEL READING: *John 20:19-23*

Latest commentaries on this Johannine pericope, as exemplified for example in the *New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (NJBC, 1990), as compared to the 1968 edition, have shown the influence of the conclusions established as probabilities by the study of the history of biblical redaction. "The evangelist has taken a traditional account of Jesus' appearance to the disciples in Jerusalem to show that the promises of Jesus' return were being fulfilled in the 'hour' of his exaltation/glorification" (NJBC, p. 983). This traditional material is proven by comparing this text with that of Luke 24:36-43 which seems to have come from the same source. In this case the audience were not only the apostles (called the "Eleven" in Lk 24:34, but still the "Twelve" in Jn 20:24) but also some disciples, like the two who just came from Emmaus and "some companions" (Lk 24:33). In fact St. Thomas, the "Twin," was absent during this appearance.

In St. John Christ's resurrection, exaltation or glorification, and the sending of the Holy Spirit happened on the same day. But this does not at all conflict with the tradition in the Acts that the ascension happened 40 days later and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The giving of the Holy Spirit in St. John is for a specific purpose: the power given to the apostles to forgive sins. While during Pentecost the promised Spirit came to animate the Church and inaugurate its mission. Yet, note the NJBC, p. 984 on this text of John: "This 'power' of forgiveness is probably expressed in the bestowing of the Spirit on those who believe as a result of the disciples' 'mission' and who join the community rather than in a process of dealing with

Christians who have committed sin (as in Matt 18:19)." But contrast the JBC p. 464: "Catholic tradition (DB 920; DS 1710) has rightly seen in this act the origin of the Sacrament of Penance, even though it is equally true that the Church's power over sin is also exercised in baptism and the preaching of the redemptive word."

## HOMILY

A sheep and a goat were walking one day searching for greener pastures when they arrived at a river bank. They saw that the grass on the other side was plentiful, fresh and green. The sheep saw a little far-off a bridge going to other side and decided to cross through it. The goat who was a bit of a show-off was impatient and made up his mind to cross by swimming. But before he reached the other bank his legs gave way and was drowned. The sheep who took the ordinary and sure route arrived safely at the other side and enjoyed the plentiful grass all the days of his life.

Christ has already established that the ordinary and sure way for the forgiveness of sins is through the sacraments of baptism and reconciliation. This is the bridge by means of which we cross to the rich land, the life of grace. Yet there are some who prefer not to use this bridge. They choose to swim directly. But how sure are they to reach the other side?

It is not because the instruments are human, the priests who are also of flesh and blood, which makes the sacrament of reconciliation effective or not effective, but the action of Christ through the Holy Spirit as given to the apostles and their successors which absolve sins. "Receive the Holy Spirit, If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound." St. Thomas who was not present during this first appearance also received this power since it was given to the apostles not as individuals but as a body to be transmitted to their successors for all time.

## SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST BLESSED TRINITY

May 29, 1994

FIRST READING: *Deuteronomy 4:32-34, 39-40*

In its literary context in Deuteronomy the liturgical reading is the conclusion of Moses' first discourse which the sacred writer presented to have taken place in the Plain of Moab opposite Jericho (Deut. 1:5). However in v. 38 the text betrays its real source since it already speaks of the possession of the Promised Land.

Whatever its historical origins may be, the text is a most sublime discourse on Israel's divine election and the wonders God performed in behalf of his chosen nation. "Did any god venture to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation...all of which the Lord your God, did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?" (v. 34).

The strict monotheistic concept in verse 39 together with other indications has convinced biblical critics that the text could not have antedated the exilic period. "Use of the vb. *bara'*, "create," again points to the exilic age (cf. Isa 45:12,18)" (NJBC, p. 98). But v. 40 speaks of "long life on the land which the Lord, your God, is giving you forever" which could imply already a post-exilic setting.

SECOND READING: *Romans 8:14-17*

The Trinitarian reality is prominent in this passage in the context of St. Paul's presentation of the life of all Christians in the Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity are involved in making a Christian adopted child of God and not anymore a slave. "The Spirit himself gives witness with our spirit that we are children of God" (v. 16). It is also through the promptings of the same Spirit that we call God the Father "Abba." Among this Jews this title is reserved only to an earthly father, whereas Christ used it to call God as his father and also enjoins the Christians, "led by the Spirit of God," to call God the Father, "Abba."

Since we are children of God we also become "heirs of God, heirs with Christ," the only begotten Son. However, St. Paul adds here an experiential aspect which would dominate the Christian life but would unite him more with Christ. This is the dimension of suffering, yet with the goal of being glorified with Christ.

## GOSPEL READING: *Matthew 28:16-20*

The gospel of St. Matthew ends with the great commissioning of the eleven disciples (definitely representing the Church) to go forth and make disciples of all the nations (*ta ethne*), baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and to teach them everything he has commanded.

There is no mention here of Christ's ascension while the event took place in Galilee to a definite mountain (the mountain has a definite article: *to oros*). But it is not clear whether this was precisely the mountain of the transfiguration (Mt. 17:1 and parallels).

*Ta ethne* which is translated here as "nations" may also be translated as "peoples." This has led to the question whether it would be enough to preach the gospel to nations in general or should reach peoples in particular. In fact with the use of the media nowadays no nation in the world could have missed hearing the message of Christ. Yet to baptize and to teach require personal contact which could not be relegated to the media. This entails great difficulties but the promise of Christ is very assuring: "know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!"

## HOMILY

The Most Holy Trinity is the divine reality which, because it transcends our human imagination and our puny reason, must be believed with the help of our will. Faith makes us in contact with the three persons in one God even though our human intellect wonders at the intense light of the mystery.

Because it is a reality which is beyond our reason does not make it unreasonable, anymore than the formula of Einstein  $e=mc^2$ , since it is beyond the grasp of a seven year old kid, becomes unintelligible. Later on when the kid studies physics it will dawn on him how real and intelligible is the formula. Later on when the soul reaches heaven he will see the sublimity of the Trinitarian reality.

It was the reality of the formula  $e=mc^2$  that unleashed the awesome power of the atoms. It is the same formula with others in its

wake which makes physicists understand the workings of energy among the stars of the universe to sub-atomic particles. All the conveniences which we experience today from the electronic wonders of radio, TV, computers, micro-wave ovens, to the photonic marvels of lasers and fiber optics are due to this and other similar formulas.

We may not grasp now the reality of the Trinitarian mystery but all our supernatural life is influenced by this reality from the moment of the creation of the world, to the whole history of salvation. In the celebration of the liturgy we begin by invoking the Trinity and the blessing after Mass is made "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The greatest bliss a person can experience will be the beatific vision of the Trinitarian reality.

## **SOLEMNITY OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST**

**June 5, 1994**

**FIRST READING: *Exodus 24:3-8***

Verses 3-8 of Exodus chapter 24 is commonly considered as belonging to the Elohist tradition together with verses 12-15a, 18b. This is the continuation of the narrative in 20:21 interrupted by the so-called "Book of the Covenant" in 20:22 - 23:33.

Our liturgical text then contains the Elohist account of the ratification of the Covenant made with the Israelites led by Moses at Mt. Sinai. We have here the service of the word and the rite. In v. 7, Moses took the "Book of the Covenant" and read it to the listening people. The people ratified the covenant by saying: "We will observe all that Yahweh has decreed; we will obey." Then the rite of casting the blood towards the people was performed by Moses, taking half of the blood already collected into basins from the immolated bullocks as communion sacrifices. The other half was cast on the altar representing Yahweh as the other party of the covenant.

Our present Eucharistic celebration has also two parts: the liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. It is interesting to note that an echo of the words used in this Old Testament passage is discernible during the institution of the Holy Eucharist (cf. Mk



14:24 and parallels" "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is to be poured out for many") and which is repeated during Mass.

SECOND READING: *Hebrews 9:11-15*

The liturgical text follows the Vatican Codex reading: *ton genomenon agathon* ("of the good things which came to be") instead of the Sinaitic and Alexandrian codices: *ton mellonton agathon* ("of the good things which were to come" as in the JB and KJV). This may imply the good institutions in the Old Testament which were perfected in the New, as the sacrifice of Christ for our eternal redemption. The event alluded to here which received its perfect meaning in Christ is the rite of *Yom Kippur* or Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16. It is only during this day that the the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies.

The word "tabernacle" here is interpreted by some commentators as Christ's resurrected body which in fact "does not belong to this creation," but it can have a local sense to mean the heavenly sanctuary "not made by human hands" to complete the analogy between the high priest of the Old Testament who with blood of goats and bulls atone the peoples sins by entering the Holy of Holies and Christ as high priest of the New Testament atoning all peoples with his own blood.

Christ has become mediator of a *kaine diatheke* (lit. "new covenant"; *kaine*, however, can also mean "excellent," "perfect"). Since *diatheke* in Greek can mean "pact," or "covenant," and also "testament," these two meanings have been utilized in the following verses (not part of our liturgical text) to stress the importance of the death of Christ to make the *diatheke*-testament effective. Covenants are also sealed by blood as in Exodus 24:6-8.

GOSPEL READING: *Mark 14:12-16, 22-26*

Our gospel pericope has two parts: the preparation of the Last Supper (vv. 12-16); and the institution of the Holy Eucharist (22-26). It is clear in the synoptic tradition, as it is here in Mark, that the Last Supper was a Passover meal with a Paschal lamb. It happened,

according to Mark, "on the first day of Unleavened Bread" (v. 12). But difficulties have arisen concerning the nature of the Last Supper since, as presented to us by the synoptics, it happened on a Thursday, which was already the 14th of Nisan as the day in Jewish reckoning starts at 6 in the evening. This is confirmed by Matthew 27:62 and John 18:28 and 19:14. In John 18:28, for instance, the Jews did not enter the praetorium of Pilate "for they would be defiled and unable to eat the passover."

Different solutions have been given to explain this discrepancy between the Synoptics and St. John. Some maintain that St. John is more historical so that the Last Supper was not really a paschal meal but an ordinary supper when Christ instituted the Holy Eucharist. But Catholic tradition has constantly maintained that the institution of the Eucharist was made in the context of a passover meal as given by the Synoptics. This would perfect the typology of the paschal lamb and the relationship of the passion with the exodus from Egypt. In fact St. Luke considers the passion of Christ as the exodus (Lk 9:31). Could it be that through his own initiative Jesus together with his apostles celebrated the paschal meal the day before? But this would entail at least the tacit approval of the temple ministers who would immolate the paschal lamb to be served at the paschal meal the day before. This could have been practiced due to the number of pilgrims in Jerusalem during such feast.

A recent hypothesis has been put up following a discovery of a solar calendar among the Qumran (Dead Sea) Scrolls in which the Passover is always celebrated on a Tuesday. This was the practice of the Essenes at Qumran. In this case Jesus and his apostles could have eaten the Last Supper Passover meal on a Tuesday. Yet the synoptic tradition is so strong that the Last Supper was on a Thursday while the Qumran sectaries seem not to be so influential and in fact suspect to the Jerusalem priesthood to make them immolate the paschal lamb on a Tuesday. According to Deuteronomy 16:6 the Passover Lamb must be sacrificed only in the temple.

## HOMILY

The greatest difference between the Catholic religion and any other religion is the Holy Eucharist. Without the Eucharist the

Church will not be what it is which is what is actually happening to those groups which, in spite of being called "Christians," deny this sacrament. The Holy Eucharist has encapsulated and perfected not only the rites and sacrifices of the Old Testament but also the whole of salvation history. It is only in the Catholic Church where the priesthood is alive and vigorous.

The Jewish priesthood is still in the state of suspension because they do not have the temple. Since they do not have the temple their priests, supposed to be under the line of Aaron, cannot be purified and, hence, cannot offer sacrifice, of course, the sacrifice of the Old Testament. The Jewish leaders now are the Rabbis, who are teachers, not the priests. In Islam, the imams, are also teachers and not priests. The same is true with many Christian denominations. Their Pastors never claim to be priests on the same rung as the Catholic priesthood. The only difference they have among the members of their denomination is that they have studied the Bible a little more and speak better, though not always, than the rest of their congregation.

The Catholic priesthood which is intimately related to the celebration of the Holy Eucharist is indeed a unique status. No wonder that the forces of evil are bent to destroy it. Dissensions have been sown and are being sown among its ranks. The age-old discipline of celibacy is being presented as a stumbling-block for its effective practice. But rest assured Christ, the eternal Priest, with whom all the other priests share their priesthood, will never let this happen.

## ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

June 12, 1994

FIRST READING: *Ezekiel 17:22-24*

This passage from Ezekiel is the conclusion of an allegory about two eagles, the first of which came to Lebanon, plucked off the top branch of the cedar and carried it to the land of merchants. This was later interpreted in vv. 12 ff. as the king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, who took King Jehoiachin (Jechoniah) to Babylon in 598 B.C. The vine in v. 5 ff. was Israel who later on was attracted by a second eagle (Egypt, v. 15) and revolted against the first eagle.

In the end Yahweh will restore the dynasty of David in Jerusalem as he has promised in 2 Samuel 7. This text in Ezekiel is truly messianic putting Jerusalem as the center of all the kingdoms. "Birds of every kind shall dwell beneath it, every winged thing in the shade of its boughs" (v. 24). This was fulfilled with the coming of Christ who established the messianic kingdom starting from a small mustard seed which became a large tree (Mark 4:30-32 and parallels).

#### SECOND READING: *2 Corinthians 5:6-10*

Contextually this passage is still part of St. Paul's defense of his apostolate starting from 2:14. Some upper-handed ministers had put him to task because of his trials and tribulations which he never made a secret of. For St. Paul these trials and sufferings are important elements of the Christian ministry. In 4:7 ff. he enumerates his difficulties and although he was still alive, he was consigned to his death everyday. But this is all for the sake of Jesus, "so that in our mortal flesh the life of Jesus, too, may be openly shown" (4:11).

He senses the tension in him being in the body because "while we dwell in the body we are away from the Lord" (5:6), so he would rather wish "to be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (v. 7). But Paul has resigned himself to this tension since what matters in his present status is not whether we are with the Lord or away from him but how to please him.

Verse 10 in this text is an important doctrine in favor of doing good works always since "each one receives his recompense, good or bad, according to his life in the body."

#### GOSPEL READING: *Mark 4:26-34*

Two seed parables are given here by St. Mark: the seeds that grow by themselves until harvest time and the mustard seed which is one of the smallest seeds growing to become a big shrub. These seeds definitely symbolize the reign of God.

The first parable is only peculiar in St. Mark but the parable of the mustard seed is also given by St. Matthew (13:31-32) and by St. Luke (13:18-19). St. Mark, on the other hand, does not have the

“parable of the leaven” which immediately follows this “parable of the mustard seed” in St. Matthew (13:33) and St. Luke (13:20-21). It seems that the parable of the mustard seed was only construed as an external growth of the kingdom of God which was supplemented by the parable of the leaven to symbolize its internal growth.

The simple lesson of the parable of the seed which grew by itself is that the kingdom of God on earth would grow by its own inherent power until the parousia or the second coming of Christ which is symbolized by harvest time. The eschatological dimension of the harvest time is confirmed by a quotation from Joel 4:13.

The parable of the mustard seed having grown into a large shrub should not be interpreted as the prediction of the time when all mankind would become Christians ready for the second coming of Christ but only the simple fact of the growth of the kingdom from a small beginning but now embracing the whole world.

## HOMILY

Statistics say that the Catholics comprise more than 18% of the whole world population which is already more than 5 billion in our time. However if we include all those who bear the name of “Christian” the percentage rises to more than 33 or one third of the world’s people. Indeed the small mustard seed has been going steadily into a large shrub. But two thirds of five billion who are not Christians is still more than three billion and the majority of these peoples are in Asia and Africa. Thus the Church has still her hands full in her mission of evangelization.

Yet how wonderful it would be for the Church even if only a fraction of her members would be as effective as St. Peter and St. Paul. No country would be as big, even as populous as China or India, that cannot be penetrated by the sharp sword of God’s word. We should long for and pray for the revival of this apostolic era whatever it may cost.

Obstacles there will always be for the spread of the Good News. Cultural and religious differences are too deep-seated. The forces of evil would not easily give up but rather seem to double their efforts to thwart the work of the Church. This tug-of-war between the good

force and the wicked force will continue as long as there is even a single soul on earth. But we have a promise, a promise that will pull all the members of the Church through in this struggle for supremacy in the world: Christ will be with us until the end.

## **TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**June 19, 1994**

**FIRST READING: *Job 38:1,8-11***

In poetic form of four lines (8-11) God told Job his power over the sea. The sea is depicted here first as a baby bursting forth from the womb. Then God set its limits until where its waves would break.

In fact our liturgical text is just part of a long poem, the first discourse of Yahweh proclaiming his power over nature with all their mysterious workings, from inanimate to animate, to show Job that all creation was made and conserved by God's wisdom. Therefore, his suffering which for Job was inscrutable, is according to God's providential wisdom. This prepares the way for a better understanding of suffering experienced by Jeremiah and the "Suffering Servant of Yahweh" culminating in the great sufferings of the Messiah.

**SECOND READING: *2 Corinthians 5:14-17***

The centrality of Christ in the life of St. Paul is very clear in this passage as he concludes his treatise on the authentic apostolate founded on Christ. It is the love of Christ which impels him. The phrase "love of Christ," may, however, be understood in two ways, either as an objective genitive (our love for Christ) or a subjective genitive (Christ's love for us). Many commentators opt for the second interpretation. It is the love which Christ has shown for us that impels Paul towards an unselfish apostolate.

The phrase "since one died for all, all died," has a mysterious tinge. But not really if we relate it to the following sentence. "All who died" actually are those who "no longer live for themselves." This is also expressed in Romans 8:13 - "if by the Spirit you put an end (that is being dead) to the misdeeds of the body you will live."

In fact being with Christ we become a new creation belonging to the new order of things with standards of judgment which are not anymore human but divine.

#### GOSPEL READING: *Mark 4:35-41*

St. Mark and St. Luke are in agreement that this episode of the calming of a storm happened after the discourse in parables. St. Matthew differs. In fact it was on the evening of that same day that they left on a boat (not accurately translated by our liturgical text which has "one day as evening drew on). In St. Mark the discourse in parables is followed by four miracles showing Christ's power over evil manifested in a storm (4:35-41); diabolical possession (5:1-20); sickness (5:21-34); death (5:35-43).

It can easily be observed that the narrative in St. Mark is more primary than that of St. Matthew and St. Luke. Even some minor details like Jesus sleeping on a pillow and the psychological reactions of the disciples are depicted in Mark.

Gradually the divine character of Jesus is being manifested to the disciples, with this incident as one turning point, as envisaged by St. Mark at the beginning of his work which is "the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (Mark 1:1). It gave the disciples something to wonder at: "who can this be that the wind and sea obey him?" It will unfold more clearly in the confession of St. Peter: "You are the Christ" (Mark 8:29), culminating in the confession of the centurion during the crucifixion: "In truth this man was a son of God".

#### HOMILY

The Church has been likened oftentimes to the boat of Peter. This boat has been sailing throughout history, sometimes smoothly, sometimes roughly as it encounters occasional storms at sea. But it steadily runs its course towards the heavenly port. There are some who have disembarked from this boat and sailed on their own rickety boats, uncertain of their safety.

Since the first years of Christianity the boat of Peter has already encountered major tempests but it has weathered them all. The

persecution instigated by Nero during the first century A.D. downed the two great apostles of Christendom, Peter and Paul, but the more the boat became secure since the helmsman has not been hampered anymore by bodily limitations. Imperial Rome, in fact, became Papal Rome and at the very site where St. Peter was crucified and buried rose the greatest Christian basilica in the world, the Basilica of St. Peter. Another basilica was also built outside the walls where St. Paul was beheaded.

There had been internal conflicts inside the boat of Peter itself, more dangerous than external storms and tempests. Anti-popes, heresies, politics have scarred some sectors of the boat but it continues floating and sailing the ocean blue. The main reason for its indestructibility and invincibility is simple: Jesus Christ is in the boat.

### **THIRTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME** **June 26, 1994**

**FIRST READING: *Wisdom 1:13-15; 2:23-24***

The doctrine of man's immortality is clear in the book of Wisdom. But this work was written most probably during the last century B.C. so that the teaching about the immortality of the soul and the rewards and condemnation after life was clarified rather late in biblical tradition.

"God did not make death." If this is understood in the sense of physical death then God could not have been the author of that death but was rather due to the devil. This is, in fact, mentioned in 2:24: "by the envy of the devil, death entered the world,..." For the first time in any biblical text the serpent of Genesis 3 is identified with the devil. If this is understood as spiritual death then physical death is its consequence. Still "God formed man to be imperishable," that is immortal.

It is worth noting that one of the arguments presented by the author for man's immortality is the fact that "justice is undying." This



may solve the problem of Qoheleth who seems to be pessimistic in his view of man's state questioning why a virtuous man is not rewarded. In contrast Wisdom has a clear view of the after life and the reward of the just and virtuous man.

SECOND READING: *2 Corinthians 8:7,9,13-15*

To understand this pericope it is necessary to recall what St. Paul already wrote in 1 Cor 16:1 ff. concerning a collection to be sent to Jerusalem. He again reminds the Corinthians of this collection and exhort them to be generous, "just as they are rich in every respect..." (v. 7). How successful he was in making this collection can be gathered from what he wrote in Romans 15:24: "First, however, I must take a present of money to the saints in Jerusalem, since Macedonia (where he wrote Second Corinthians only a month or so before) and Achaia (where he wrote Romans a little later) have decided to send a generous contribution to the poor among the saints at Jerusalem." That St. Paul was able to bring this money to Jerusalem is mentioned in Acts 24:17.

The second paragraph of the liturgical text gives the theological reason for being generous to others. Our Lord Jesus has himself shown favor to us. He made himself poor for our sake though he was rich. However St. Paul adds even giving relief to others should not make things difficult for ourselves (v. 13).

GOSPEL READING: *Mark 5:21-43*

As was already stated in last Sunday's commentary on the calming of the storm in St. Mark, that episode was the first of the four miracles which followed after the discourse in parables. The second which is the cure of a Gerasene demoniac (Mk 5:1-20) is omitted in our Sunday liturgy, while the third and fourth are joined in today's Gospel reading: the cure of a woman with hemorrhage and the resurrection or healing of the daughter of Jairus.

The cure of the woman with hemorrhage is now found united with the story of the resuscitation of the daughter of Jairus but it seems they were independent narratives. As the NJBC observes, "the story of Jairus's daughter (5:21-24, 35-43) is told in short sentences,

with few participles and in the so-called historical present tense; the story of the woman with the flow of blood (5:25-34) is narrated in longer sentences using many participles and in the aorist and imperfect tenses." At any rate they are also found united in Matthew and Luke although these two could have depended from the narrative of Mark.

The narration in Mark is especially important since it is here where the Aramaic words of Jesus are preserved: *Talitha, kum!*

## HOMILY

Jesus was not only a wonder worker. He was first and foremost a healer of souls, a savior. He was the principal nemesis of evil. He makes a pre-requisite for his healing an act of faith. As he said to the cured woman inflicted for twelve years by hemorrhage: "Daughter, it is your faith that has cured you" (v. 34). He told Jairus for the sake of his daughter: "Do not be afraid; only have faith" (v. 36).

No effect of evil, not even sickness and death, nay, evil itself, can withstand the power of the Messiah. The tempest, diabolical possession, sickness, death, all of these were overpowered just by his words, just by a touch of his garments.

If the death of the body which is the worst of all physical evils was already conquered by the Lord then all other physical evils should not anymore be feared at. What is a tooth-ache, a sprained foot? What is cancer? What is AIDS? What is to be imprisoned, to be tortured? They are all less physical evils than bodily death.

What we should fear is spiritual death. But we cannot die spiritually unless we will it. Spiritual death is total separation from God, from the author of supernatural life. We cannot be separated totally from God unless our will comes into play. Those who are condemned to hell are those who will to be there. In the same way those who go to heaven are those who will to go there supernaturalized by the grace of God.