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## In this Issue

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*Honorato Castigador, O.P.*

*With his Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, Pope John Paul II has once again reiterated the constant teaching of the Church on the ordination of women. The Church "holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood, for very fundamental reasons." This is further explicitated by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger in his comments on the same Apostolic Letter.*

*In the local scene, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines issued four statements, including a letter to President Ramos on matters of immediate and vital concern. One of this is on the forthcoming Cairo International Conference on Population and Development. Here, the Bishops expressed their concern on the Philippine Government's stand on population and how it will be represented in Cairo. The pastoral letter of the Archbishop of Manila expresses this sentiment and this led into a massive protest rally held at the Luneta last August 14. Because of some criticisms on Cardinal Sin's action, Fr. Ranhilio Aquino presents in his article some constitutional arguments in support of the Cardinal's decision.*

*Some follow-ups are in order in this issue. Fr. Norberto Castillo shares his reflections on the "Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators" which we published in the March-April issue of the Boletin, while Fr. Pedro Tejero continues with his thoughts on the priesthood. Fr. Javier Gonzalez, on the other hand, explains to us the "Communion of Saints" as contained in the Apostles' Creed and one of the articles of the New Catechism of the Catholic Church.*

## **Ordinatio Sacerdotalis**

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*John Paul II*

APOSTOLIC LETTER  
OF HIS HOLINESS POPE  
JOHN PAUL II  
TO THE BISHOPS  
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH  
ON RESERVING PRIESTLY  
ORDINATION TO MEN ALONE

*Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate,*

1. Priestly Ordination, which hands on the office entrusted by Christ to his Apostles of teaching, sanctifying and governing the faithful, has in the Catholic Church from the beginning always been reserved to men alone. This tradition has also been faithfully maintained by the Oriental Churches.

When the question of the ordination of women arose in the Anglican Communion, Pope Paul VI, out of fidelity to his office of safeguarding the Apostolic Tradition, and also with a view to removing a new obstacle placed in the way of Christian unity, reminded Anglicans of the position of the Catholic Church: "She holds that it is not admissible to ordain women to the priesthood, for very fundamental reasons. These reasons include: the example recorded in the Sacred Scriptures of Christ choosing his Apostles only from among

men; the constant practice of the Church, which has imitated Christ in choosing only men; and her living teaching authority which has consistently held that the exclusion of women from the priesthood is in accordance with God's plan for his Church."<sup>1</sup>

But since the question had also become the subject of debate among theologians and in certain Catholic circles, Paul VI directed the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to set forth and expound the teaching of the Church on this matter. This was done through the Declaration *Inter insigniores*, which the Supreme Pontiff approved and ordered to be published.<sup>2</sup>

2. The Declaration recalls and explains the fundamental reasons for this teaching, reasons expounded by Paul VI, and concludes that the Church "does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination."<sup>3</sup> To these fundamental reasons the document adds other theological reasons which illustrate the appropriateness of the divine provision, and it also shows clearly that Christ's way of acting did not proceed from sociological or cultural motives peculiar to his time. As Paul VI later explained: "The real reason is that, in giving the Church her fundamental constitution, her theological anthropology — thereafter always followed by the Church's Tradition — Christ established things in this way."<sup>4</sup>

In the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, I myself wrote in this regard: "In calling only men as his Apostles, Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner. In doing so, he exercised the same freedom with which, in all his behaviour, he emphasized the

<sup>1</sup>Paul VI, *Response to the Letter of His Grace the Most Reverend Dr. F. D. Coggan, Archbishop of Canterbury, concerning the Ordination of Women to the Priesthood* (30 November 1975): AAS 68 (1976), 599.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Inter insigniores* on the Question of the Admission of Women to the Ministerial Priesthood (15 October 1976): AAS 69 (1977), 981-16.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, 100

<sup>4</sup>Paul VI, *Address on the Role of Women in the Plan of Salvation* (30 January 1977): *Insegnamenti*, XV (1977), 111. Cf. also John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988), n. 51: AAS 81 (1989), 393-521; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1577.

dignity and the vocation of women, without conforming to the prevailing customs and to the traditions sanctioned by the legislation of the time.”<sup>5</sup>

In fact, the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles attest that this call was made in accordance with God’s eternal plan: Christ chose those whom he willed (cf. *Mk* 3:13-14; *Jn* 6:70), and he did so in union with the Father, “through the Holy Spirit” (*Ac* 1:2), after having spent the night in prayer (cf. *Lk* 6:12). Therefore, in granting admission to the ministerial priesthood,<sup>6</sup> the Church has always acknowledged as a perennial norm her Lord’s way of acting in choosing the twelve men whom he made the foundation of his Church (cf. *Rv* 21:14). These men did not in fact receive only a function which could thereafter be exercised by any member of the Church; rather they were specifically and intimately associated in the mission of the Incarnate Word himself (cf. *Mt* 10:1, 7-8; 28:16-20; *Mk* 3:13-16; 16:14-15). The Apostles did the same when they chose fellow workers<sup>7</sup> who would succeed them in their ministry.<sup>8</sup> Also included in this choice were those who, throughout the time of the Church, would carry on the Apostles’ mission of representing Christ the Lord and Redeemer.<sup>9</sup>

3. Furthermore, the fact that the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church, received neither the mission proper to the Apostles nor the ministerial priesthood clearly shows that the non-admission of women to priestly ordination cannot mean that women are of lesser dignity, nor can it be construed as discrimination against them. Rather, it is to be seen as the faithful observance of a plan to be ascribed to the wisdom of the Lord of the universe.

The presence and the role of women in the life and mission of the Church, although not linked to the ministerial priesthood, remain absolutely necessary and irreplaceable. As the Declaration *Inter insigniores* points out, “the Church desires that Christian women

<sup>5</sup>Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem* (15 August 1988), n. 26: AAS 80 (1988), 1715.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, n. 28; Decree *Presbyterorum ordinis*, n. 2b.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. 1 *Tm* 3:1-13; 2 *Tm* 1:6; *Ti* 1:5-9.

<sup>8</sup>Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 1577.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen gentium*, nn. 20, 21.

should become fully aware of the greatness of their mission: today their role is of capital importance both for the renewal and humanization of society and for the rediscovery by believers of the true face of the Church."<sup>10</sup>

The New Testament and the whole history of the Church give ample evidence of the presence in the Church of women, true disciples, witnesses to Christ in the family and in society, as well as in total consecration to the service of God and of the Gospel. "By defending the dignity of women and their vocation, the Church has shown honor and gratitude for those women who — faithful to the Gospel — have shared in every age in the apostolic mission of the whole People of God. They are the holy martyrs, virgins and the mothers of families, who bravely bore witness to their faith and passed on the Church's faith and tradition by bringing up their children in the spirit of the Gospel."<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, it is to the holiness of the faithful that the hierarchical structure of the Church is totally ordered. For this reason, the Declaration *Inter insigniores* recalls: "the only better gift, which can and must be desired, is love (cf. 1 Co 12 and 13). The greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven are not the ministers but the saints."<sup>12</sup>

4. Although the teaching that priestly ordination is to be reserved to men alone has been preserved by the constant and universal Tradition of the Church and firmly taught by the Magisterium in its more recent documents, at the present time in some places it is nonetheless considered still open to debate, or the Church's judgment that women are not to be admitted to ordination is considered to have a merely disciplinary force.

Wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter which pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the

<sup>10</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Inter insigniores*, n. 6: AAS 69 (1977), 115-116.

<sup>11</sup>Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, n. 27: AAS 80 (1988), 1719.

<sup>12</sup>Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Inter insigniores*, n. 6: AAS 69 (1977), 115.

brethren (cf. *Lk* 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful.

Invoking an abundance of divine assistance upon you, venerable Brothers, and upon all the faithful, I impart my Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, on 22 May, the Solemnity of Pentecost, in the year 1994, the sixteenth of my Pontificate.

## The Limits of Church Authority

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Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger\*

### 1. The Reason for the document and its context

In the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, on reserving priestly ordination to men alone, the Supreme Pontiff Pope John Paul II has not proclaimed a new doctrine. He is simply confirming what the whole Church — East and West — has always known and lived in faith. She has always recognized in the figure of the Twelve Apostles the norm of all priestly ministry and has submitted to this norm from the outset. For her part she knew that the twelve men, with whom according to the faith of the Church priestly ministry has its origin in the Church of Jesus Christ, are bound to the mystery of the Incarnation and are thereby appointed to represent Christ — to be, as it were, living and acting icons of the Lord.

In this century two factors have caused the previously undisputed certitude concerning the will of Christ in instituting the Church to appear to many as more and more questionable. Where Scripture is read independently of the living Tradition, in a purely historical way, the concept of institution becomes less evident. The origin of the priesthood is then no longer seen in the nascent Church's recognition and acceptance of the will of Christ, but in a historical process not preceded by any clear founding will, and which therefore could have developed in a fundamentally different way. In this understanding, the criterion of institution for all practical purposes

\*The Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith comments on the Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*. *L'Osservatore Romano*, N. 26 - 29 June 1994.



loses its validity and can therefore be replaced by the criterion of functionality. This development of a new relation to history combines with the anthropological upheavals of our day. The symbolic transparency of the corporeality of man, which is self-evident to a sacramental way of thinking, is replaced by the functional equivalence of the sexes. What was previously the bond to the mystery of origin is but now regarded as discrimination against half of humanity, as the archaic holdover of an outdated image of man that must be opposed by the struggle for equal rights. In a world thoroughly characterized by functionality, it has become difficult even to conceive of view points other than those of functionality. The real nature of the sacrament, which is not derived from functionality, can hardly be perceived at all.

Given this situation, it was the duty of the papal Magisterium to recall the essential contents of Tradition. In the same context is to be found the Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith *Inter insigniores*, on the question of the admission of women to the ministerial priesthood, published on 15 October 1976 with the approval and at the direction of Pope Paul VI.

The Declaration's central affirmation is the following: "The Church, in fidelity to the example of the Lord, does not consider herself authorized to admit women to priestly ordination" (*Inter insigniores*, Introduction). With this statement, the Magisterium professes the primacy of obedience and the limits of ecclesial authority. The Church and her Magisterium do not have an authority coming from themselves, but only from the Lord. The believing Church reads and lives the Scripture not in the form of historical reconstruction, but within the living community of the People of God of every age. She knows herself to be bound to a will which precedes her, to what the Lord instituted. This will which precedes her, the will of Christ, is expressed for her in the choice of the Twelve.

The new document, signed by the Pope himself, builds on the Declaration *Inter insigniores* of 1976 and presupposes it. At the same time, it stands in continuity with other subsequent texts of the Magisterium which touch on the same theme in larger contexts:

— In the Apostolic Letter *Mulieris dignitatem*, the Holy Father writes: "In calling only men as his Apostles, Christ acted in a completely free and sovereign manner" (n. 26).

— In the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici*, the Pope declares: "In her participation in the life and mission of the Church, a woman cannot receive the sacrament of Orders, and therefore cannot fulfil the functions proper to the ministerial priesthood. This is a practice that the Church has always found in the expressed will of Christ, totally free and sovereign, who called only men to be his Apostles" (n. 5 1).

— *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* again takes up the same doctrine, affirming that "the Lord Jesus chose men (*vir*i) to form the college of the Twelve Apostles, and the Apostles did the same when they chose collaborators to succeed them in their ministry.... The Church recognizes herself to be bound by this choice made by the Lord himself. For this reason the ordination of women is not possible" (n. 1577).

## 2. The basic statement of the text

Despite these clear affirmations of the Magisterium, the uncertainties, doubts and disputes about the question of the ordination of women have continued also in the Catholic Church and become in part even more intensified. A one-sided understanding of infallibility as the only binding form of decision in the Church has become a lever for relativizing the documents mentioned above and for thus asserting that the question is still open. This state of uncertainty on a question touching the core of the life of the Church obliged the Pope to intervene anew, for the explicit purpose "that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance" (*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, n. 4).

If the Church openly and unambiguously expresses here the limits of her authority, this surely has practical consequences in the realm of discipline, but it is not all just a disciplinary question, that is, a problem of ecclesial practice. Rather, the practice is the expression and concrete form of a doctrine of faith. Priesthood, according to the Catholic faith, is a sacrament, that is, not something invented by the Church for pragmatic reasons but something given to her by the Lord. Consequently, she cannot give it any shape she wishes; instead she can only hand on in respectful fidelity what she

has received. The question of the subject, that is, of the possible recipient of ordination, is already given and is not subject to the Church's decisions. It is a question pertaining to the Church's constitution itself (*Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, n. 4).

The Apostolic Letter distinguishes two levels of the Church's doctrinal statements on this point:

a) The doctrinal foundation of the teaching and practice of the Church is found in the example of Christ, expressed in the choice of the Twelve, who then received the title "Twelve Apostles." This institution of Christ, which followed a night spent in prayer with the Father (cf. *Lk* 6:12, 16), is described in the document in its theological depth from Scripture: Jesus' choice is at the same time a gift from the Father. Accordingly, the testimony of Scripture has been understood and lived from the beginning and without a break in Tradition as the binding commission of Christ. The Magisterium knows itself to have been placed in the service of this interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

b) If then the will of Christ, as attested to by Scripture, lived in Tradition and interpreted by the Magisterium, is the essential reason for the Church's teaching, it is not enough to view this will positivistically as a kind of arbitrary norm. Christ's will is always a will of the *Logos*, that is to say, a will full of meaning. The task of the

<sup>1</sup>Again and again, the normative meaning due to the institution of the group of the Twelve is relativized. The materially rich contribution of W. Beinert is impressive ("Dogmatische Überlegungen zum Thema Priestertum der Frau" in *ThQ* 173 [1993], 186-204). A detailed discussion of the arguments he proposes would go beyond the scope of this brief essay. But even without great discussions it should be apparent that Beinert's examples of non-normative actions of Jesus cannot be put in parallel with the choice of the Twelve. "Although Jesus ... was philanthropic, he still did not free the servant of the centurion of Capharnaum from slavery" (p. 189). The omission of a socio-revolutionary action can hardly be placed on the same level as the positive act of calling the Twelve, which proceeds in the New Testament from the heart of the messianic consciousness of Jesus (cf. the Bible text in n. 2 of the document). The same is true *mutatis mutandis* for the following example: although Jesus "emphasized the value of celibacy for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, he nonetheless called the married man Peter to be the leader of his flock ..." (p. 189). Also the further examples given on p. 191 for the directions and forms of behavior of Jesus forgone in the further development do not take into account, on the one hand, the specific character of the calling of the Twelve, and on the other, the specific literary form and historical classification of the texts in discussion (the ban on oath-taking; the ban on preaching to the pagans — before the Cross and Resurrection!; participation in the Jewish cult and separation therefrom — in the year 70 the cult as such was extinguished!).

believer seeking to understand the faith is to look for the meaningful in this will, so that it can be communicated and lived according to its meaning and with interior acceptance.

In fact, the above-mentioned Declaration *Inter insigniores* in its fifth section devotes itself at length to the attempt to understand interiorly the will of Christ. In contrast, the new document limits itself essentially to the first level, without ignoring the importance of the second. The Pope places a limit on himself here. He recognizes his duty to emphasize the fundamental decision which the Church does not have the power to make for herself but must accept in fidelity. He leaves to theology the task of drawing out the anthropological implications of this decision and of showing its soundness in the context of the present-day dispute about man. What I indicated at the outset about the symbolic-sacramental vs. functional views of man shows how difficult such a task is. But it also shows how necessary and rewarding it is to devote oneself to it. To be sure, the Church has something to learn from the modern view of man, but the modern world too has for its own part something to learn from the wisdom which is preserved in the tradition of faith and which cannot be dismissed simply by labeling it archaic patriarchalism. Where namely the connection is lost to the will of the Creator and, in the Church, to the will of the Redeemer, functionality easily becomes manipulation. The new esteem for woman which was the justified point of departure of modern movements ends then soon in contempt for the body. Sexuality comes no longer to be seen as an essential expression of human corporeality, but as something external, secondary and ultimately meaningless. The body no longer reaches what is essential to being human, but comes to be considered an instrument we employ.

But let us return to the self-imposed limitation of our document which, as has been said, regards anthropological reflections not its task but one for theologians and philosophers. With this limitation, the Pope once more clearly places himself in the basic line of discussion initiated by *Inter insigniores*. The point of departure is the bond to the will of Christ. The Pope becomes thus the guarantor of obedience. The Church does not herself invent what she should do, but discovers in listening to the Lord what she must do and let stand. This viewpoint was critical for the decision of conscience of those Anglican bishops and priests who now feel themselves impelled to join

the Catholic Church. As they have explained with ample clarity, their decision is not a vote against women but a decision for the limits of the Church's authority. This is clearly articulated, for example, in Bishop Graham Leonard's foreword to the theological history of Anglicanism written by Aidan Nichols. Leonard speaks of four recent developments which undo the structure essential to the dialectic of the Anglican understanding of the Church. The fourth of these developments he sees in "the power which has been given to the General Synod of the Church of England to determine questions of doctrine and morals... and to do this by majority votes, as if in these matters the truth could be determined in this way. The Church of England rejects the doctrinal authority of the Pope, but the Synod tries to exercise a teaching function which theologically has no foundation and which, for all practical purposes, claims to be infallible.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, similar voices have also been raised in the Lutheran Church in Germany, where for example Professor Reinhold Slenczka strongly opposes the fact that majority decisions taken by ecclesial bodies are practically declared necessary for salvation, and it is forgotten that the "great consensus" in the Church, which the Reformers declared the supreme authority, consists in the agreement of Church teaching with Scripture and the Catholic Church.<sup>3</sup> With the new document, the Pope does not wish to impose his own opinion but precisely to verify the fact that the Church cannot do whatever she wants and that he, indeed precisely he, cannot do so. Here it is not a question of hierarchy opposed to democracy, but of obedience opposed to autocracy. In matters of faith and the sacraments, as well as in the fundamental issues of morality, the Church cannot do what she wants, but becomes Church precisely in assenting to the will of Christ.

<sup>2</sup>Aidan Nichols, *The Panther and the Hind: A Theological History of Anglicanism* (Edinburgh 1993); preface by Bishop Graham Leonard, pp. ix-xiii; citation, p. xii.

<sup>3</sup>R. Slenczka, "Theologischer Widerspruch: Brief vom 16. November 1992 an die EKD," in *Diakrisis* 14 (1993), 187ff. Important p. 188: The "*magnus consensus* which the position appeals to ... consists, according to the *Confessio Augustana* (CA) I and according to the resolution of Part I of the CA (BSLK 83 c f) in the agreement of ecclesial teaching with Scripture and with the Christian or, as it is called in the Latin text, the catholic Church. It (the *magnus consensus*) is not based on a majority that in the last decades has outvoted or eliminated definitively a minority, but on the truth as the foundation of unity. That we are dealing with the introduction of women's ordination with a novelty in contrast to apostolic teaching and catholic community, even representatives of such resolutions cannot dispute..."

### 3. Methodological presuppositions and the authority of the text

At this point yet another objection may emerge. It may be said: as an idea it is fine and good; but Scripture does not teach it all that clearly. Various passages are then adduced which seem to relativize or nullify this conviction of Tradition. It is pointed out, for example, that in the Letter to the Romans (16:7), Paul supposedly indicates as a distinguished apostle a woman, Junias, together with her husband Andronicus: "they were in Christ before me." The "deaconess" Phoebe was supposedly some kind of community pastor; she is said to have had charge of the community at Cenchreae and to have been very well known also outside it (*Rm* 16:1-2).<sup>4</sup> In this regard, one would naturally first of all have to say that such interpretations are hypothetical and can only claim a very moderate degree of probability. This leads us back once again to the question which confronted us at the very beginning: who is the real interpreter of Scripture?

<sup>4</sup>U. Wilckens develops these arguments in conversation with M. Mugge in: U. Hahn (ed.), *Der Glaube ist keine Privatsache. Gespräche mit Altbischof U. Wilckens* (Hannover 1993), 147-177, esp. 170f, cf. also U. Wilckens, *Der Brief an die Römer III* (Benziger — Neukirchen 1989), 131 and 135f. E. Kasemann evaluates the texts quite differently in *An die Römer* (Tübingen 1973). Re Phoebe: "The word *Prostátis* used here only in the New Testament cannot according to the context designate the leader or representative of a community.... Women ... appear according to the Revelation of John to have occupied in heretic circles as prophetesses ecclesial positions of leadership ..." (p. 392). "Andronicus and Junias" are according to Kasemann both male names; he views them to be "Jewish-Christian missionaries," "who ... may claim the title of apostle ..." (p. 394). H. Schlier, *Der Römerbrief* (Freiburg 1977) holds something similar to Kasemann re Phoebe: *Prostatis* means *per se patrona*, but cannot be understood here in the technical-juridical sense as "chairman" or "representative" "... but generally or metaphorically as someone who extended help and protection to the community and the apostle himself" (p. 441f.). He also sees Junia(s) as a male name; re the title of apostle he says: "The *apóstoloi* who proclaimed the word in pairs as 'companions of the yoke' are either emissaries of a community ... or traveling proclaimers of the Gospel.... From this broad concept of *apóstolos* Paul developed then the concept of apostle, which presumes the 'seeing' of the risen one, and limits it from there then to the 'Twelve' and to himself ..." (p. 444). J. A. Fitzmyer, *Romans* (Doubleday 1993) leaves the meaning of the word "diakonos" open here (729f.); re "prostatis" he remarks: "... Phoebe was perhaps a superior or at least a leader of the Christian community of Cenchreae.... We can only speculate about the kind of assistance she gave ..." (p. 731). Re Junia(s): "Paul writes *Iounian*, which could be the accusative singular of the female name *Iounia*, -as, 'Junia', or the accusative singular of the masculine name *Iouniás*, -á, 'Junias'" (p. 737). To the title of apostle: "The prepositional phrase *en tois apostolois* may mean 'those of mark (numbered) among the apostles' or 'those held in esteem by the apostles'.... The former sense would mean that Andronicus and Junia were *apostoloi*. This title is not to confuse with *hoi dodeka*, 'the Twelve' ..." (p. 739).

Whence do we gain certitude about what it wishes to say to us? If there is only the purely historical interpretation, and nothing else, then Scripture cannot give us any ultimate certainty at all. The certainty of historical research is by its very nature ever only hypothetical: none of us was there. Scripture can become the foundation of a person's life only when it is entrusted to a living subject -- the same subject from which it came itself. It arose within the People of God guided by the Holy Spirit, and this People, this subject, has not ceased to exist. The Second Vatican Council expressed this in the following way: "Thus it comes about that the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone. Hence, both Scripture and Tradition must be accepted and honored with equal feelings of devotion and reverence" (*Dei Verbum*, n. 9).

This means that a purely historical certainty — one which prescind from the faith lived by the Church in history — does not exist. This impossibility of a purely historical basis does not at all lessen the significance of the Bible. The certainty communicated in the teaching by the Church is verifiable in and from the Scripture. Scripture, Tradition and the Magisterium are, according to the Vatican Council, not to be considered as three separate and unrelated things, but rather Scripture read in the light of Tradition and lived in the faith of the Church discloses its full meaning in this living context. The Magisterium is there to strengthen the interpretation of Scripture made possible by listening to the Tradition in faith.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup>To the question of what exegetical certainties are possible or unattainable the article by E. Schussler-Fiorenza is instructive ("Neutestamentlich-fruhchristliches Argument zum Thema Frau und Amt. Eine kritische feministische Reflexion," in *ThQ* 173 [1993], 173-185). The statement on p. 174 is interesting: "Scholarly studies on the development of Church office are numerous but not conclusive. Their results are dependent on the respective hermeneutic starting point and dogmatic understanding of the Church." The author then depicts from her hermeneutic starting point a picture of development according to which the way from an originally strictly egalitarian community in which "in principle every one had access to ... common functions of leadership" (p. 176) is said to lead to an ever stronger patriarchalization whereby severe reproaches are raised against the pastoral letters (pp. 178ff.). The author accordingly sees contradictory positions in the canon of the New Testament itself and in this respect ascertains consistently: "Both, radical equality of everyone and the exclusion of women and others subordinated by Church leadership, can therefore be biblically-theologically grounded." In this respect, it becomes apparent in this remarkable contribution that whoever demands women's priesthood must dissolve the New Testament canon.

The Church's Tradition has always recognized in the choosing of the Twelve the act of Jesus which gave use to the priesthood of the New Testament. It thus sees in the Twelve and in the apostolic ministry of the Twelve the normative origin of the priesthood. Catholic theology too accepts other symbolic dimensions of the group of the Twelve. The latter are also the beginning and symbol of the new Israel. But these additional symbolic dimensions do not detract from or diminish the priestly reality which the Lord established with the calling of the Twelve. For this interpretation of Scripture too the principle mentioned above holds true: "the Church does not draw her certainty about all revealed truths from the holy Scriptures alone."

In view of a magisterial text of the weight of the present Apostolic Letter, inevitably another question is raised: how binding is this document? It is explicitly stated that what is affirmed here must be definitively held in the Church, and that this question is no longer open to the interplay of differing opinions. Is this therefore an act of dogmatizing? Here one must answer that the Pope is not proposing any new dogmatic formula, but is confirming a certainty which has been constantly lived and held firm in the Church. In the technical language one should say: here we have an act of the ordinary Magisterium of the Supreme Pontiff, an act therefore which is not a solemn definition *ex cathedra*, even though in terms of content a doctrine is presented which is to be considered definitive. In other words, a certainty already existing in the Church, but now questioned by some, is confirmed by the Pope's apostolic authority. It has been given a concrete expression, which also puts in a binding form what has always been lived. One might use the example of channeling water from a spring. The water itself remains unchanged but is protected against the possibility of draining away or being lost.

4. Supplementary questions: Discrimination against women? Ecumenical stumbling block?

Let us turn finally to two pressing questions of our day: Is this not once again a case of discrimination against women? Does not this hinder the progress of ecumenism?

a) The Pope — recalling in this context the Declaration *Inter insigniores* — is concerned about the need, deeply felt today, of eliminating any unjust discrimination against women. On this point,



the Holy Father evokes with emphasis the dignity of Mary, Mother of God and Mother of the Church. That Mary, who enjoyed the highest dignity possible to a creature did not also receive the specific mission of the apostle and the priestly office, clearly shows that the non-calling of women to priestly service in no way is based on a lesser dignity of woman and cannot constitute discrimination against her (cf. *Ordinatio sacerdotalis*, n. 3).

In order that this statement may become credible, a further clarification about the nature of the priestly ministry is to be sure necessary. In the current discussion on women's ordination, priesthood is understood — and as if this were something self-evident — as “decision making power.” Were this the essence of the priesthood, then it would certainly be difficult to understand why excluding women from “decision-making” and thus from “power” in the Church would not constitute a form of discrimination. We have seen earlier that the specific task of the Pope in the Church is to be the guarantor of obedience *vis-à-vis* the word of God, which is not to be manipulated. The same is true on different levels for Bishops and priests. If, for example, in the different councils the priest enjoys the power of veto in questions involving faith and morals, this is not a case of asserting hierarchical privileges against the will of the majority (prescinding altogether from the question of how such majorities are constituted and whom they really represent). It is a question rather of establishing the point where the will of the majority ends and obedience begins — obedience to the truth, which cannot be the product of a ballot. No one who reads the New Testament carefully will find the priest anywhere described as a “decision-maker.” This way of looking at things can only arise in a purely functional society, one in which everything is determined by us ourselves. In the view of the New Testament, the priest must be understood in the light of Christ crucified, in the light of Christ who washes his disciples' feet, in the light of Christ who preaches, who says: my teaching is not mine (cf. *Jn 7:16*). Being taken into the sacrament is a renunciation of oneself in order to serve Jesus Christ. Where the priesthood is lived correctly, this becomes clearly visible, and the competing idea dissolves of itself. This is perfectly clear from Polycarp of Smyrna to the Curé of Ars and up to the charismatic priest figures of our own century. The logic of worldly power-structures does not suffice to explain the priesthood, which is a sacrament and not a form of social organization. The priesthood cannot be understood according to the criteria of function-

ality, decision-making power and expediency, but only on the basis of the Christological criterion which gives it its nature as a "sacrament" — as a repudiation of personal power in obedience to Jesus Christ.

To be sure, an examination of conscience cannot be avoided here. Unfortunately, there are not only holy priests but there is also the lived contradiction in which the priesthood does indeed appear to be reduced to decision-making and "power." Herein lies a task of great responsibility for priestly training and for spiritual direction in the priesthood. Where a person's life does not bear witness to the word of faith but distorts it, the message cannot be understood.

In this context, I would like to recall a few words of recent Popes which emphasize what has been said so far. As Paul VI put it: "we cannot change what our Lord did, nor his call to women, but we must recognize and promote the role of women in the mission of evangelization and in the life of the Christian community."<sup>6</sup> Pope John Paul II follows this line of presentation when he says: "Above all the acknowledgement in theory of the active and responsible presence of women in the Church must be realized in practice" (*Christifideles laici*, n. 51).

In explaining the papal document, one must take care to stress the strong recognition of the equal dignity of men and women in the order of sanctity. Every thing else in the Church exists only as a support to foster holiness. This is the common goal of all men; what counts finally before God is holiness alone. Together with the equal human dignity of the sexes, however, there is always need to recall their specific missions and thus to resist all new forms of Manicheism, which seeks to reduce the body to something irrelevant, "merely biological," thus depriving sexuality of its human dignity, its specific beauty, and which is only capable of conceiving an abstract and asexual human nature.

b) Finally, a brief word on the ecumenical question. No one can seriously state that this new document represents an obstacle to ecumenical progress. The document expresses the obedience of the Church *vis-à-vis* the biblical word lived in Tradition; it is precisely a self-limitation of Church authority. Thus the document guarantees

<sup>6</sup>Paul VI, Address to the Committee for International Women's Year, 18 April 1975: AAS 67 (1975), 266.

the unbroken communion with the Churches of the East in understanding the word of God as well as in the sacrament which builds up the Church. No new point of controversy in relation to the communities originating from the Reformation is raised, for the question of what the priesthood is, whether a sacrament or finally a service to be regulated by the community itself for its order, has from the beginning been part of the disagreements which led to the division in the 16th century. The fact that the Catholic Church (like the Orthodox Churches) remains steadfast in her conviction of faith, which she sees as obedience to the Lord, cannot surprise or wound anyone. On the contrary, it will be an occasion for reflecting together even more carefully on the pressing underlying issues: the relationship between Scripture and Tradition, the sacramental structure of the Church herself and the sacramental character of the priestly ministry. Clarity in expression and a common will to obey the word of God are the bases for dialogue. No new conflict has been created, but rather a renewed challenge to reflect on the existing division from its depths, and to seek once more and with ever greater fervor, with eyes fixed on the Lord, the path of unity.

## An Artist in Search of a Medium: Postscript to the Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators

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Norberto M. Castillo, O.P.

The document *Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators* was issued by the Congregation for Catholic Education on November 4, 1993, in response to Paul II's *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (*Boletín Eclesiástico*, vol. LXX, 1994). The urgent need to form seminary educators was previously echoed in *Optatam Totius* which emphasized the criteria of sound doctrine, suitable pastoral experience, spirituality and teaching methods (n. 5). Further emphasis is made in *Ratio Fundamentalis Institutionis Sacerdotalis* (n. 30).

In this article I will discuss some reflections regarding some specifics on teaching methods and its related aspects. This is one of the major thematics indicated in the *Directives*. By and large, my reflections are related to our local conditions and do not follow the order of thematics found in the document.

1. Given a choice, the young priest will not choose to be assigned to a seminary to assume a teaching assignment. Given no choice, he will request to be assigned to a parish after some years of teaching stint to some other ministry which involves mobility and diversity. Experience in teaching which is vital gives way to the next neophyte who understandably will have to start all over again. If assignment to a parish means pastoral experience *post factum* to teaching, he should be a good candidate to reinforce the seminary teaching staff in the future.

2. Mere credentials such as the required degree does not necessarily equip the neophyte teaching effectiveness (n.50). As an

art, the love for and the skill in teaching is feasibly imbued in the seminary by teaching assignments as part of the pastoral program or apostolate (n.51). Some religious orders and congregations have found this practice quite encouraging. Experienced mentors in higher education will tell us that teaching methods are best nourished by a sustained previous teaching practicum in the lower levels, *e.g.* secondary and primary levels. Teaching methods and classroom management are best tested at these levels.

3. As there is a marked difference in the quality of teaching delivered by an experienced professor who keeps on updating his learning methods and materials from one who does not, there is a marked difference between a stance of a new professor from one who has the experience. The strong temptation that bedevils the new mentor is to teach the way his professors in the seminary has taught him and possibly use the same set of notes he learned from. But as all of us had our own initiation years, it seems necessary that the new mentor is guided in pedagogical skills, given the benefit that he possesses the science. Better still, some form of apprenticeship with an experienced professor is desirable. This approach seems to be more effective in addition to the instruction and degrees granted by ecclesiastical institutions. An exposure as a student in a credible institution known for its instructional excellence will go a long way in enriching the experience gained from the seminary.

4. There is an increasing awareness today of the need to attend seriously to the affective areas of the educand (n.58). Similarly, teaching methods must be conscious of the vital importance of this areas so that the classroom interaction does not become very formalistic and overly speculative without accompanying analogies to life experiences which educands easily identify. The unknown is better taught from the known, and the choreography of teaching methods is made in consideration of the context of the educand whether this be social, educational, economic, etc. Teaching effectivity is best predicated on its student-centered strategies.

5. Teaching is fundamentally formative and integrative (n.62). This means that the mentor should be open to questions from the educands. The exposure of vulnerabilities created by the premium set on the interrogative should never be taken in its negative sense. It should in fact be taken as an occasion to identify the weaker points of the teaching process. The mentor should in fact be very encouraging

in this matter. Questions are more important than answers, and the depth and quality of questions should be noted by the perceptive mentor since this asset is indicative of a thinking skill which is beginning to germinate in the learner. Questions are very revealing of the underlying assumptions on which they are based and formulated. Mentors should develop the art of questioning and versatile test construction approaches so that the same questions are not administered all the time. Teachings should never be taken as a simple exercise of a delivery system where one simply reads one's lectures oblivious of the educands' reactions and unconscious of the threshold of interactive contact between the lecturer and the audience. The essence of formative teaching transcends the academics and extracurricular activities. For one, it is life itself which demands that the team approach goes beyond lip service. The term formator does not refer only to the core seminary staff but to all mentors both lay and cleric, teaching the seminarians.

6. Lectures should never be monologic. They should involve student participation from the start to finish. Obviously this requires immense patience on the part of the mentor especially so when a definite coverage is dictated. Patience is one virtue which mentors can never subsist without. If long readings are indispensable, they should be distributed as handouts and classroom instruction should be spent discussing the contents. Similarly, dictations should be minimized if at all this is unavoidable. With the availability of copiers, the limited three hour per week meeting should be used in more student-mentor interactions.

7. Learning is better accomplished by 'doing' activities (n.66,71,77). The mentor should concoct diversified activities which make use of the contents so that rote memorization is avoided. Cheating in examinations is not simply a result of students' weaknesses but equally so of the mentor, vis-a-vis, the recall type of questions which insists on the type of answers that occasion and lead to the 'creative' use of xerox-aided memory. This happens too when the mentor has become very predictable in regard to the kind of questions he asks. Otherwise, teaching as well as examining via a battery of creative questions incites the mind to function and the mental wrestling with the givens capitulate in better cognitive registration. This method evokes the whole person to personal involvement and hopefully develop autonomy and convictions.

8. Assignments as teaching strategies are geared towards the principle of 'Teaching learners how to learn.' They should be well designed, properly discerned, and should be subjected to regular evaluation. This means that the research spirit should be imbued by a mentor who teaches as a fruit of his research (n.59). The 'learning' mentor seems to have better chances in enthusing his educands to learn. While there is very little that can be taught within the constraints of a three hour per week period, the availability of the mentor should be emphasized. Most of the learning that the educand gains takes place outside the classroom. When the *Directives* mention the ideal of seminary mentors as residents of the same institution, this may imply that availability of the mentor extends beyond classroom periods. Mentors must realize that extra period consultations are quite encouraging and very fruitful for the seminarian who may not be attuned yet to asking questions in class. When the mentor sees fit, he should discuss a vital question taken up in consultations for the benefit of the whole class during the regular class hours.

9. Language no doubt is an important component to be considered seriously. Presumably, english is the medium of instruction used in our country. In a recent survey of the *EDCOM*, the study revealed that both students and mentors were deficient in english. A tortured english of the mentor can only breed the kind of english in the educand. It is a waste of time wailing about the kind of language proficiency our students have when this skill was not appropriately measured in the admission examinations or was hardly used as a major criteria among the required skills when accepting applicants. It is no use wailing when the very mentors who handle our seminar-ians may be experiencing serious language difficulties. The current method of multiple-choice type of language proficiency examination based on synonyms and antonyms may not be suited for seminary purposes which involves essay writing. The ideal is to require the educands to compose regular essays and these essays be reviewed with the writer by the mentor. Obviously, this entails a tremendous expenditure of time and effort. This burden is an indicator of commitment to teaching.

10. The checking of exams conducted via essay forms is dreaded by seminary mentors. It is no different in the case of lay instructors. If we are convinced of the fact that learning is appropriated via language forms, then, the responsibility of developing comprehen-

sion skills is dependent on the whole body of educators of the seminary. Every course is deemed as basically a core reading course in concert with all the rest.

11. Interdisciplinarity means that the choice of cognate or auxiliary courses such as the natural sciences, pedagogical training, psychology and counselling, etc., is well thought of and is equally taken seriously by their mentors and educands. When available, the services of experts in these fields should be availed. Our world have become increasingly complex and involved that insulating ecclesiastical sciences as atomary units distantiated from the rest of the civil sciences are a thing of the past. It is not surprising to note that educands trained in a strong liberal arts program are perceived to perform better as philosophy and theology students in terms of openness, articulation and broader reflective skills. One can never underestimate the value of a good program in literature, economics, sociology, the natural sciences and mathematics, and their contribution to a more robust and relevant ecclesiastical science. If the *Directive* considers pastoral experience as an important factor for seminary educators, the lay mentors who are practicing and excelling in their profession would be preferable as collaborators in the seminary faculty (n.20). It is presumed however that for both groups, the requirements of *Pastores Dabo Vobis* of "exemplary life, maturity and strength of personality" is pursued (n.66).

12. Interdisciplinarity also means what while one has specialized in a specific area, one is cognizant of "*scientia debita*" of the core curriculum so called in view of the special objectives of the seminary and of its related areas (n.54, 66). It is a good idea to form the conscience of the lay faculty (and the clerics too!) on these matters and not leaving this to chance (n.77).

13. There is no doubt that the the choice of the best candidate for inclusion as seminary educator is immensely difficult given a set of criteria (n.23-4). That we do not have enough choices to make and we settle with whomever is available is a fact of experience. To have somebody handling the subject appears to be always a lesser evil than not to have any mentor in the classroom at all.

14. This means that the seminary faculty headed by its rector will have to undertake and pursuesome kind of a faculty development and understudy program. Training programs should be organized for



those who are actually teaching and for those who are geared to be included in the team in the future (n.50-51). The extra time and money needed for this programs may be easily said than done. The clerics have their pastoral duties to attend to, and the lay will apportion the rest of their time to their regular jobs since seminary teaching is usually undertaken out of friendship and pious intentions. Seminary teaching being of part time nature will never spell decent wages. Yet, it is more than clear that meetings should be held more often than the occasions for discussion regarding the distribution of subject assignments. Seminary teaching definitely involves a different character (n.29) and this requires added care and vigilance. Grades of seminarians require hermeneutics that will aid the seminary superiors more information in discerning vocation.

15. The real teacher is one who enjoys the intangibles of teaching over and above monetary considerations. The sense of fulfilment enables the mentor to enthuse on the requirements and burdens demanded by such vocation and he ought to be resourceful in improving his teaching skills and performance. Whether lay or cleric, it is an added advantage to develop contacts with one's peers in their respective specializations (n.66). As self-correcting professionals, we should be sensitive to our limitations and work on their improvement (n.25). This reflects the need of both conscience and conscientiousness.

16. The library is one of the most important facilities in the seminary (n.64). The quality of this facility reflects the quality of learning that takes place and the priorities set by the institution. With very few seminaries as exceptions, majority of these libraries are languishing with manuals for instruction. These manuals are reminiscent of our fast food age where memory of definitions and divisions is considered learning. This approach infers no less than a tragic transference in teaching. This is a view that makes ecclesiastical sciences too simplistic, if not cheap. The absence of primary or major sources will no doubt disable quality teaching in the seminary. Indeed, the development of the seminary library demands an ongoing priority for those who command the purse. But what if they do not see it this way? Then the seminary rector will have to explore other feasible strategies to ameliorate this need. Otherwise, if such sources are available in the personal library of the mentor, magnanimity will lead all roads to the copier.

17. There is a need to review and revise the curriculum regularly, *salvatis salvandis*. This is occasioned primarily by the onset of research in various fields found especially in journals which make our reading materials updated with current studies and debates. Local problems may be used as major thematics and a cooperative effort may be organized which taps the local experts available in the place.

18. The consciousness of the nature of seminary teaching that all educators in the seminary must be imbued with entails a continuing *ante hoc* conscientization faculty development programs. This should lead to an alignment of all activities both academic and extracurricular towards this end. This means that an educator who has ceased updating has lost the moral right to teach. These two operations must function in parallel simultaneity.

19. There is a need to convene seminary professors in this country during the summer months to attend in-service conferences to be sponsored by the CBCP to discuss fundamental commonalities encountered in the performance of their jobs in the seminary. In-service conferences must involve activities aside from lectures. These conferences may deal with the possibility of sharing of library resources, scheduling of travelling experts in ecclesiastical and other specialized sciences, and training in formation and spirituality geared towards the lay members of seminaries, etc. (n.82). With the proliferation of seminaries all over the country, understandably due to the swelling population in regional centers, we must insist on working out feasible strategies that will facilitate the pooling of human and economic resources (n.81). When this process occurs in time, we can say that the Philippine Church has learned to work as one, for the One Church.

20. International exposure of senior seminary educators creates added confidence to the mentor. While this is encouraged and supported, provisions should be provided for the understudy mentor to take over. Some institutions have formalized instructional contents that have been studied and approved as the teaching framework required in each course cum required readings and learning objectives. This approach buffers the educands from ill-effects emanating from disruption of learning programs due to changes in the mid-stream of assignments, transfer, or other necessary measures including sabbaticals (n.80).

21. The text of the document is more than emphatic, almost repetitive in its insistence on the quality of the moral condition and lifestyle that fertilizes committed teaching and scholarship required of seminary educators. No amount of academic preparation and specialization will offset and overcome this requirement. Given a perceived difficulty, steps should be taken to resolve them and decisions be undertaken. This is the non-negotiable hidden curriculum that underlies all the activities that we have discussed.

## Separation of Church and State and Cardinal Sin

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*Ranhilio C. Aquino*

It seems that the battle-lines are now clearly drawn. Cardinal Sin, not one to mince words, has lashed out repeatedly at the government for what he judges to be moral decadence in its campaign to cut down on the birth rate and on the threat of AIDS by more widespread use of artificial means of contraception. Many, eager to defend government and its obviously liberal policy, have lashed out in turn at Cardinal Sin for violating "the separation of Church and State."

Catch-words and slogans can be so emotionally charged as to easily lend themselves to demagoguery — a form of manipulation against which I have constantly inveighed. "Separation of Church and State" is one such phrase. It does not lend itself to simplistic treatment, and treatises on Constitutional Law, both local and foreign, attest by ponderous chapters dedicated to the theme, to this fact. Unfortunately, "a little learning is a dangerous thing" and those who have heard the phrase get a liking for it and wield it quite indiscriminately for their reckless purposes.

It is my position that Cardinal Sin and Church leaders do not violate the separation of Church and State by speaking in defense of Catholic morals as they have done and that there is neither constitutional nor statutory obstacle to their doing so. I will further argue that they are morally obliged to take the stand they have thus far taken.

In terms of formulation, there is not much difference between the non-establishment and free exercise clauses of the American

Constitution (*First Amendment*) and *Article III, Section 5* of the Philippine Constitution of 1987. Provisions, however, have to be read in their contexts and the immediate context of the provision enshrining the separation of Church and State is the entire fundamental law itself.

American jurisprudence has dealt with the non-establishment clauses in several leading cases and the doctrines laid down are now known. A public school cannot lead its students in communal prayer; a Christmas creche may not adorn a public building, etc. It is my position that in view of the proper context of our own non-establishment clause in the Philippines, our jurisprudence must necessarily be different from the American rendition.

Our preamble invokes “the aid of Almighty God” — in marked contrast to the rather impersonal “Divine Providence” of earlier versions of the Constitution. Of course, this change should not be exaggerated but, of the preamble, Bernas rightly holds that “because it sets down the origin, scope, and purpose of the Constitution, it is useful as an aid in ascertaining the meaning of ambiguous provisions in the body of the Constitution.” If the preamble then is not to be trivialized as a meaningless set of words, then we have to take its claim seriously that we are a people who invoke the aid of God. Separation of Church and State then cannot mean State godlessness — at least not in the Philippines. *Section 12, Article II* declares the State’s obligation to protect “the life of the unborn from conception.” I admit that provisions declaring State policies and principles are not self-executory. They do state, however, the parameters legislation and regulatory action may not trespass, and this section *precludes the State from promoting and endorsing abortion as a population policy*. I cannot see how one can read it otherwise without prevaricating.

The very same section recognizes “the primary right and duty of parents in the rearing of the youth for...the development of moral character” and directs the government to lend its support. In other places in the Constitution, the necessity of building “moral character” is upheld (Art. II, Sec. 13, Art. XIV, Sec. 3, paragraph 2 that determines strengthening “ethical and spiritual values” as well as developing “moral character” to be one of the goals of education). These provisions leave no doubt that for the State, *morality is not a matter of indifference*. In its programs, plans of action and commit-

ments, the State is committed by these constitutional provisions to act with moral responsibility. When Cardinal Sin then forcefully calls attention to moral considerations, far from ramming through the fictive "wall of separation" (an American metaphor that sometimes wields a powerful influence over our juridical paradigms) between Church and State, he is the spokesman of the ethical and spiritual values the Constitution mandates the State to pursue. It is they who would have the Church silenced and complacent who are selective in their reading of the Constitution.

Significant in determining the intendment of the Constitution are the exemptions and privileges extended to institutions established for *religious* purposes. (*Sec. 28, paragraph 3 of Art. VI* and *Sec. 4, paragraph 2 of Art. XIV*, for example.) By these concessions the Constitution recognizes the inseparability of religion from public life and the *responsibility* of government for the persistence of the salutary effects of religion on the body politic.

Of moment is *Sec. 3, Art. XV* which mandates the State to defend "the right of spouses to found a family in accordance with their religious convictions and the demands of responsible parenthood." This provision is unique to the Philippine Constitution. On this score — and consequently on the entire issue of non-establishment and free exercise — American jurisprudence cannot be of much help to us. Religion is not merely to be tolerated. The State is rather directed to defend the right of spouses to establish their families in accordance with their religious beliefs. When a State uses its powerful propaganda machinery and resources to lead couples to make choices in utter disregard of their religion's moral prescriptions, in what sense is the government acting in consonance with the Constitution? By what fiction can such a government be said to *defend* the right of a couple to found a family in accordance with its religious convictions?

Cardinal Sin decries Secretary Flavier's gross insensitivity to ethics because the Cardinal wishes the President to be true to his oath: "to defend and to uphold the Constitution," the Constitution that directs the State to uphold the right of spouses to found their families consonant with (*not* oblivious of) their religious beliefs. It is also clear that Cardinal Sin and Church leaders have a sworn duty to remind the faithful to live in accordance with their faith.

Morality goes by standards other than popularity and expedience. Sometimes, I get the impression, when unenlightened journalists tread on matters they are ill-prepared to write on, that they think morality to be a matter the Church is entirely free to decide about. The Church does not decide what is good and what is evil. In fact, Aquinas was very reasonable when he maintained that not even God can make that which is evil good, and vice-versa! That the Church maintains the use of artificial means of contraception to be dishonest is the result of the Magisterium's analysis of the logical consequences of the demands of the Gospel as well as human dignity. In this sense, her position is non-negotiable not because the Church obdurately refuses to negotiate, but because it is not in her capacity to negotiate!

That many Catholics disagree with the position of the Magisterium *does not argue against the Church's position*. Once more, it must be remembered that moral issues are not settled by a counting of noses (— or condoms sold, for that matter)! The fact that many of the corrupt in government do not agree with the harshness of our special laws against corrupt practices does not argue against the legal correctness of these laws. And yet, this illogicality has frequently been foisted against the Church — many times, by journalists and demagogues.

In insisting that artificial contraception be excluded from prevailing agenda, the Church exhorts faithful (and non-faithful alike) to be respectful (and not manipulative) of others, responsible in regard to one's sexual dynamism and authentically self-giving in the commitment of married life. The Church insists that true love should be considerate and self-sacrificing. There may not be much sympathy for this kind of thoughtfulness in the Philippines today, but *whim* and *righteousness* have never been synonymous!

The Church is relevant only for as long as she is prophetic — and *prophets have seldom been accepted, especially in their own countries and among their own kinsmen*.

But our Constitution is, at least, provident enough to stay the hand of anyone who would silence the prophet, even in the presence of kings!

## **A Spiritual Profile of Today's Priest**

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*Pedro G. Tejero, O.P.*

A good profile of the priest for our times should take into consideration most of the following features or characteristics. It can also serve as a help for self-reflection or personal analysis.

1. The priest for today must be a man who reads and listens to the Gospel. His entire life is well grounded on the spirituality of Christ as the Supreme Priest to whom he is configured by his ordination. His total commitment is to spread vigorously and joyfully the good tidings of Christ's message.

2. The priest for today must be an ecclesial man in great love with the local and universal Church. He loves the Pope and the bishops. This helps him to accept and carry out in a spirit of faith and obedience whatever is commanded or recommended for the good of the Church. He ponders on the spirit of St. Augustine's saying: "A man possesses the Holy Spirit to the measure of his love for Christ's Church."

3. A priest for today is a man who is well acquainted with the problems, difficulties, sorrows and aspirations of his fellowmen. In his prayer he finds a perfect way to integrate his life with that of the people God entrusted him. He knows how to dialogue.

4. The priest of today is a man always open to hear those around him and lets himself to be evangelized by them. He is aware of his imperfections and limitations and never looks down on others with arrogance.



5. The priest of today understands very plainly that he is called not to domination or to honors but to give himself to the total service of God and neighbor in his pastoral ministry following the footsteps of Christ crucified.

6. The priest for today is a man free from the clutches of ideologies and political creeds. He judges events and criticizes attitudes with great equanimity and dispassion.

7. A priest for our times is a man of sincere and profound prayer life. He has an intimate and personal experience of God. He is deeply conscious that if he is going to bring the Gospel to the people, he must first welcome Christ's message into his heart.

8. The priest of today knows that he is not the center of the community and that his authority is not meant to control or command as politicians do. He is in the community as the faithful servant to guide at all times and ready to give his life for his people like Christ.

9. The priest of today is fully aware that his priestly celibacy is for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. In celibacy he devotes himself to the Lord with an undivided love and he bears witness to the realities of the world to come.

10. In conclusion, the priest of today is mindful that he cannot do his mission in a satisfactory way if he remains in isolation. He can be successful only by joining forces with other priests under the direction of Church authorities.

# The Communion of Saints: Its Reality and Implications

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Javier González, O.P.

When we profess our faith in the “communion of saints,” what do we proclaim to believe? In other words, what does the Communion of Saints consist in? And which are the practical implications of this article of the Catholic faith in the day-to-day life

In the following pages I will first have a look at the dogma: its Scriptural bases and theological content as well as the presentation that the new Catechism of the Catholic Church makes of it. Then, I will try to draw some of its practical implications in the lives of the believers both on the personal and on the social level, focused mainly on the present-day Philippines.

## I. UNDERSTANDING THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

Immediately after confessing “the Holy Catholic Church,” the Apostles’ Creed adds “the Communion of Saints.” In a certain sense this latter article is a further explanation of the former. For “what is the Church if not the assembly of all the saints?” (Nicetas, *Expl. symb.* 10:PL 52:871b). The communion of saints *is* the Church.

### 1. The Church as Communion

The Church is presented as “communion” (*koinonia*) by the modern Ecclesiology. The documents of the Vatican II Council stand as witnesses to it, for in them we read that the Church, as the People of God, is... “an interpersonal community, whose members are united

in love of the Father through Christ and in the Spirit, and also united with one another by the Spirit of Christ, through whom they have access not only to the Father but to one another."

No wonder the *Final Report* of the 1985 Assembly of the Synod of Bishops said that "the ecclesiology of communion is the central and fundamental idea of the Council's documents." A communion *sui generis*, evidently. A communion that refers not only to the invisible relation of unity of men among themselves in the "new relationship between man and God established in Christ" but also includes those visible and juridical relations among Christ's faithful.

The Church is one: "The society structured with hierarchical organs and the mystical community, the earthly church and the church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities; on the contrary, they form one complex reality which comes together from a human and a divine element" (*LG*, 8).

When Paul wanted to express the unity of Christians, he compared the group of believers to a human body and called it the body of Christ. In this one body there are different parts. Each part is needed by every other part, each needs the others as well. Each believer has a role to play in the one body (*1 Co* 12:12-30).

In this picture of the Church, the diversity does not destroy the unity. Furthermore, it brings out the complementarity and necessary contribution of the different charisms and ministries. As the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines put it, "Sharing and mutual interaction of the different members characterize the Church. It is through this sharing and interaction that everybody's need is supplied" (*Acts and Decrees*, n.91).

This reminds us of the idealized picture of the early Jerusalem community which, fired by the love of Jesus and inspired by his word and Spirit, gathered to worship, to pray, to share and to serve. The same is true today: It is evident that the visible communion here on earth in the teaching of the apostles, in the sacraments, and in the hierarchical order (*faith, sacraments and governance* in the words of c. 205) is a sign and source of invisible communion among the sharers.

The Church is, in fact, a *communion of saints*. The common visible sharing in the goods of salvation (*the holy things*), especially

in the Eucharist, is the source of the invisible communion among the sharers (*the saints*). This communion brings with it a spiritual solidarity among the members of the Church, insofar as they are members of one same body, and it fosters their effective union in charity by constituting them “one heart and soul” (Ac 4:32). Communion tends also towards union in prayers (Ac 2:42), inspired in all by one and the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit who, borrowing St. Thomas’ words, “fills and unites the whole Church” (*De Veritate*, q.29,a.4,c).

In its invisible elements, this communion exists not only among the members of the pilgrim Church on earth, but also between these and all who, having passed from this world in the grace of the Lord, belong to the heavenly Church or will be incorporated into her after having been purified (*LG*, 49). This means, among other things, that there is a *mutual relationship* between the pilgrim Church on earth and the heavenly Church in the historical-redemptive mission. Hence the ecclesiological importance not only of Christ’s intercession on behalf of his members (*Heb* 7:25), but also of that of the saints and, in an eminent fashion, of the Blessed Virgin Mary. *Devotion to the saints*, which is such a strong feature of the Christian people, can thus be seen to correspond in its very essence to the profound reality of the Church as a mystery of communion. (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops...* on May 28, 1992, n.6).

The Church, as the new People of God is communion. The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ; and it is to this Body that the Communion of Saints is particularly linked.

## 2. The Belief in the Communion of Saints

### a. Who are the Saints?

Most of us probably would wince if someone were to call us a saint. We are too conscious of our imperfections to accept such a title. Nowadays the word “saint” is limited generally to those who are in heaven. And yet, in the early Church, all faithful members of the mystical body of Christ were classified as ‘saints.’ It was St. Paul’s favorite term for members of the Christian community. He speaks of “the saints who are at Ephesus” (*Ep* 1:1) and the “saints that are in the whole of Achaia” (2 *Co* 1:1). The Acts of the Apostles, which is the

history of the infant Church, also classifies as saints all who are followers of Christ.

The word "saint" derives from the Latin word *sanctus*, which means "holy." Absolutely speaking, the term "saint" applies only to Christ ("The Holy One of God"). Then, after Christ, relatively and by sharing in his holiness, to Mary (the "Full of Grace"); to those recognized as such by the Church through canonization or beatification; to all who are in heaven, even if not individually recognized as saints by the Church; to the souls in Purgatory, who are on their way to heaven; and finally, to all those disciples of Jesus who are still in this world and live in God's sanctifying grace. Indeed every Christian soul, incorporated with Christ by baptism, and harboring within himself the Holy Spirit, is *holy*, is a *saint* in the original meaning of the word.

Hence, the expression "Communion of Saints" refers to the union that binds together the members of the Church on earth (the "Militant Church") with the Church undergoing purification in Purgatory (the "Suffering Church") and the "Church Triumphant" and glorious in heaven, into which it will be absorbed, after the last Judgment, both the Church Militant and the Church Suffering. Such are the three present states of the Church, as described by the Second Vatican Council (*LG*, 49).

Members of the Communion of Saints are, therefore, (1) first of all, ourselves, pilgrims on earth, still struggling and fighting against sin and error; (2) the souls in purgatory, established in grace forever, even though their minor sins and debts of penance have still to be purged away. They cannot yet see God, but the Holy Spirit is in them and with them, never again to be lost; and (3) finally, all the souls of the blessed in heaven. All are called "Saints" because they are destined to enjoy, or are presently enjoying the beatific vision of God.

### *b. Doctrinal Content of the Dogma*

This dogma is an article of the Catholic Faith, a belief of great antiquity — the expression "communion of saints" is found in the Latin versions of the Apostles' Creed from the end of the fourth century (*Dz* 19:26-30) — traditionally accepted and taught by the Church.

It teaches us not only that there exists indeed a spiritual unity or solidarity among the faithful on earth, the souls in purgatory and the saints in heaven, but also that this unity and charity among them are real and personal, alive and active. An union "rooted in Christ, and reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods" (LG, 49).

How is such exchange or communication actualized? Using the analogy of any ordinary society, where the members are interdependent with each other and interact with one another by way of their interrelated roles, in the Communion of Saints the energizing principle of charity is actualized in the constant interchange of spiritual activities and benefits among the members. As one big family, they share in the spiritual treasures of the Church, helping one another through prayer and intercession, and in the partaking of the merits of their good work.

In concrete, through Communion, the blessed and the angels in heaven help the suffering souls in purgatory and the faithful on earth by unceasingly praying for them and by making intercessions for them to God. Through the Communion, too, the souls in purgatory, whose right to merit anything for themselves had expired, pray to the angels and saints for the sake of the living. The faithful on earth can greatly relieve the sufferings of the souls in purgatory by offering Masses for them, by prayer, fasting, indulgences and meritorious work. At the same time, we, the living, venerate and honor the saints as special friends of God who champion our cause to Him. For the living, we help one another by means of prayers, spiritual and corporeal works of mercy, in the practice of virtues especially charity, in living out the Christian message and in refraining from committing sins as they adversely affect us and our brothers.

Strong were Paul VI's words in his *Creed of the People of God*: "We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church; and we believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and his saints is always [attentive] to our prayers" (Paul VI, *CPG*, 30).

### *c. The Scriptural basis of the dogma*

The Kingdom of God is like a banquet (Mt 8:11; Lk 14:16-24), a table-fellowship, a joyful communion with the Lord and with one's

fellow human beings. The notion of Communion is evident indeed in the many parables of Our Lord on the Kingdom of heaven. In them Jesus wants us to know that men are saved as a body and that the Church community is but God's Kingdom on earth, linked to the heavenly Kingdom which is to come.

St. John, in his interpretation of the Lord's parable of the Vine and the Branches, explains his own concept of the fellowship of love, the common life of charity which men and the angels share with the Father and His Son (*1 Jn* 1:3).

However, the most striking description of this extraordinary union is best illustrated by St. Paul in his epistles when he tells us of the union of one body whose head is Christ (*Col* 1:18), governed and enlivened by charity (*Ep* 4:16), and whose members are not only of this world but also of the world to come (*Heb* 12:22,23). All members of this body though they retain their own unique identity and individuality, are dependent upon one another (*Rm* 12:5) as they share in the same blessings (*1 Co* 12:25) and prayers (*Ep* 6:18). St Paul describes the Communion of Saints further by writing that it is a whole system, controlled by its very head, Jesus Christ Himself, and that it is "joined and knit together... when each part is working properly, makes bodily growth and up-builds itself in love" (*Ep* 4:16).

#### *d. What Church History Attests*

The phrase "Communion of Saints" may have been the latest addition to the Apostles' Creed; yet it is no less authentic or less dogmatic than all the rest. Church History attests to the very early emergence of this concept of three-dimensional communion even as far back as the second century of Christianity. The early Fathers of the Church already toyed with the idea. In the East, Clement of Alexandria (d.215) and Origen (d.254) both wrote of a communion between the living and the saints in heaven. St. Basil (d.377) and St. John Chrysostom (d.407) both showed familiarity with the doctrine in their apologetics or written answers in defense of the practice of invocation of the saints and offering prayers for the dead, two novel teachings which were caught under fire. St. Augustine spoke of that "unity of charity" as very similar to his conception of the "City of God" whose citizens include the saints and the angels, the just on earth and, to some degree, even the sinners.

St. Thomas Aquinas developed the doctrine in the thirteenth century with greater clarity. He defined the Communion of Saints as a participation in the spiritual goods. The superabundant merits of Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints make up the spiritual "treasure of the Church." The merits of Christ are communicated to all, and the merits of the members are communicated to the other members of the fellowship. "Since all the faithful form one body, the good of each is communicated to the others... We must therefore believe that there exists a communion of goods in the Church. But the most important member is Christ, since He is the head... Therefore, the riches of Christ are communicated to all the members, through the sacraments" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Symb.*,10).

The Council of Trent called the Church's "constituent parts" as one gone before (those in heaven and purgatory), the other (those on earth) following everyday. The catechism of the Council also stated the following principle: "Every pious and holy action done by one belongs and is profitable to all, through charity which seeks not her own." Its declaration gave clear approval to certain practices in the Church such as the gaining of indulgences for ourselves or for the souls of our loved ones in purgatory, and the ability of those in purgatory to apply the value of their sufferings to the living, the veneration of the relics of saints and the invocation of the same.

*e. The Communion of Saints as described in the new Catechism of the Catholic Church*

The 1992 Catechism starts developing this topic by saying that the Church is a "communion of saints"; and gives the expression two closely linked meanings: communion "in holy things" (*sancta*), above all the Eucharist, and communion among "holy persons" (*sancti*).

(1) COMMUNION IN "HOLY THINGS"

In the primitive community of Jerusalem, the disciples "devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers. Those who believed shared all things in common" (Ac 2:42). The Church is not only an assembly of the People of God (*ekklesia*) but a community (*koinonia*). This communion is concretely manifested through sharing of goods.



*Communion in the faith.* The faith of the faithful is the faith of the Church, received from the apostles. Faith is a treasure of life which is enriched by being shared.

*Communion of the sacraments.* The fruit of all the sacraments belong to all the faithful. The sacraments are sacred links uniting us with one another and binding all to Jesus Christ. Baptism is the gate by which we enter into the Church. The communion of saints must be understood as the communion of the sacraments... "The name *communion* can be applied to all the sacraments, for they unite us to God. But this name is better suited to the Eucharist than to any other, because it is primarily the Eucharist that brings this communion about" (*Roman Catechism* I, 10, 24).

*Communion of charisms.* Within the communion of the Church, the Holy Spirit "distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank" for the building up of the Church (*LG*, 12, 2). Now, "to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (*1 Co* 12:7).

*Communion of material goods.* "They had everything in common" (*Ac* 4:32). "Everything the true Christian has is to be regarded as a good possessed in common with everyone else. All Christians should be ready and eager to come to the help of the needy... and of their neighbors in want" (*Roman Catechism* I, 10, 27). A Christian is a steward of the Lord's goods (cf. *Lk* 16:1, 3).

*Communion in charity.* "None of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself" (*Rm* 14:7). "If one member suffers, all suffer together, if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (*1 Co* 12:26-27). "Charity does not insist on its own way" (*1 Co* 13:3). In this solidarity with everyone, living or dead, which is founded on the communion of saints, the least of our acts done in charity redounds to the profit of all. Every sin harms this communion.

## (2) THE COMMUNION OF THE CHURCH OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

The Catechism, after mentioning the three states of the Church (the disciples pilgrim on earth; those who have died and are being purified; and those who are in glory contemplating God in full light), describes this communion in four paragraphs entitled: (a) The inter-

cession of the saints; (b) Communion with the saints; (c) Communion with the dead; and (d) In the one family of God. Accordingly,

(a) *The saints in heaven love us and pray for us as well as for those in purgatory.* The saints in heaven are not so rapt in their own bliss as to forget those they have left behind. They could not forget if they would. Their perfect love for God cannot but include a love for all the souls whom God has made and adorned with his graces, all the souls in whom God himself dwells, all the souls for whom Jesus died. In short, the saints *must* love the souls whom God loves. The love that the blessed in heaven have for the souls in purgatory and the souls on earth is not a passive love. We might call it an active, *hungry* love.

"Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness... they do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus... So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped" (LG, 49).

Who does not remember those moving words of St. Dominic, dying, to his brothers: "Do not weep, for I shall be more useful to you after my death and I shall help you then more effectively than during my life..."? I am glad the Catechism quoted them, as well as those touching words of St. Thérèse of Lisieux: "I want to spend my heaven in doing good on earth." They are but two examples of a burning love that cannot be extinguished with physical death.

(b) *We love and honor the saints.* We, for our part, honor the saints. Not just because they can and will pray for us; but also because our love for God demands it. An artist is honored when his works are praised. The saints are masterpieces of God's grace; when we honor them, we are honoring their maker, their sanctifier and their redeemer. Honor given to the saints is not honor taken from God. On the contrary, it is honor given to God in a manner which He himself has indicated and desires. And it is worth remembering that when we honor the saints, we are undoubtedly honoring many of our own loved ones who, although may not have been canonized by the Church, now are with God in heaven.

Using St. Bernard's poetry language, "The memory of the saints enkindles in us a vehement longing: the one of enjoying their company, of being accepted as co-citizens with them, of being num-

bered among the Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Martyrs, Confessors, Virgins... In short, of being gathered together in the Communion of Saints, sharing their same glory and joy. Indeed the triumphant Church is waiting for us. The saints are missing us..." (*Breviary*, Feast of All Saints, 2nd Reading).

"We worship Christ as God's Son; we love the martyrs as the Lord's disciples and imitators, and rightly so because of their matchless devotion towards their king and master. May we also be their companions and fellow disciples!" (*Martyrium Polycarpi*, 17: *Apostolic Fathers* II/3, 396).

This homage strengthens the union of the whole Church and brings us closer to Christ: "It is not merely by the title of example that we cherish the memory of those in heaven, we seek, rather, that by this devotion to the exercise of fraternal charity the union of the whole Church in the Spirit may be strengthened. Exactly as Christian communion among our fellow pilgrims brings us closer to Christ, so our communion with the saints joins us to Christ, from whom as from its fountain and head issues all grace, and the life of the People of God itself" (*LG* 50).

(c) *We remember and pray for the dead.* As members of the communion of saints, we upon earth also pray for the suffering souls in purgatory. They cannot help themselves now; their time for meriting is past. But we can help them by the favor of God. We can relieve their sufferings and speed them on to heaven by our prayers for them, by the Masses we offer and have offered for them, by the indulgences we gain for them. "In full consciousness of this communion of the whole Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, the Church in its pilgrim members, from the very earliest days of the Christian religion, has honored with great respect the memory of the dead; and 'because it is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead that they may be loosed from their sins' she offers her suffrages for them" (*LG*, 50; cf. 2 *M* 12:45).

Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective. Indeed our prayer for them becomes indirectly a prayer for ourselves: How could the souls in purgatory once they are numbered among the saints in heaven forget us who remembered them in their need? They will be our special intercessors with God!

(d) *We must pray for and love one another here on earth.* It is obvious that we upon earth must also pray for and help one another if we are to be faithful to our obligations as members of the Communion of saints. We must have a truly supernatural love for one another, practicing the virtue of fraternal charity in thought and word and deed, especially by performing the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. If we are to assure ourselves of *permanent* membership in the communion of saints, we dare not take lightly our responsibilities here.

This is a *conditio sine qua non* to fulfill our vocation of children of God. "For if we continue to love one another and to join in praising the Most Holy Trinity... we will be faithful to the deepest vocation of the Church" (LG, 51).

### 3. Some Related Questions/Answers

**Q.** *Do sinners and unbelievers benefit from the Communion of Saints?*

**A.** Strictly speaking, only those baptized believers who are in a state of grace (spiritually alive), enjoy full membership in the Body. However, those here on earth who alienate themselves from God by unrepented grievous sins benefit also from the Communion of Saints, at least indirectly, for the recovery of their lost grace. They are not entirely excluded although, by virtue of their sinful state, they deprive themselves of the spiritual benefits that ordinarily go to an unobstructed membership. Likewise, even non-believers can become beneficiaries, in the sense that they receive help in discovering and accepting the Faith.

**Q.** *Is it right to commend ourselves to the prayers of Mary and of other saints in heaven?*

**A.** Yes. Precisely because we believe in the Communion of Saints. It was said before that the saints in heaven cannot forget those they have left behind. Their perfect love for God includes a love for all those whom God has made and for whom Jesus died. The saints long to help us onward to heaven. And if the prayer of a good man on earth has power with God, how much more the prayers which our Blessed Mother and the saints offer for us! They are God's heroes, God's intimate friends. The saints in heaven indeed pray for us.

*Q. Is it likewise right to ask other believers to pray for us?*

**A.** Yes, it is. Innumerable Christians pray for us, including many we do not know and whom we have never met. Just imagine contemplative nuns praying constantly for priests and religious, for lay apostles, for parents, for teachers, for students, for the youth, for the sick and the suffering, for the poor, for the unemployed, etc. How many things have been given to us as a result of the prayers of others?

In chapter 18 of the book of Genesis we see Abraham interceding for Sodom: a dramatic example of how the prayers and the merits of the just can help others. Likewise, chapter 27 of the Acts of the Apostles tells us the story of how the ship carrying Paul to Rome met with a death-threatening storm and how, "as a favor" to Paul, the Lord spared the lives of the 276 men on board. These two cases, just to mention some, for Scripture abounds in such examples, prove beyond all doubt the truth of what St. James (5,16) says: "The prayer of a good man has a powerful effect."

*Q. What are the indulgences, and where do they come from?*

**A.** They are a direct result of the dogma of the Communion of Saints. All the prayers, good works and merits of all the *saints* (all the members of Christ's Mystical Body, specially the Blessed Mother and the heavenly saints), united to the infinite satisfactory merits of Christ Himself, make up what is known as "the treasure" of the Church, a treasure that the Church distributes among her members in need of spiritual assistance.

What is the reason behind all this? In God's plan of salvation not a word of prayer, not a tear of sorrow or a twinge of pain offered to him is wasted. Every bit of satisfactory merit which a person may gain and which is not needed to satisfy for his own sins is added to the total fund of satisfaction upon which the Church may draw for the needs of her children. This great reservoir of accumulated satisfactions is available to us for paying the debt of temporal punishment which is due for our sins.

It is upon this spiritual treasury of satisfactory merit that the Church draws when she grants indulgences.

*Q. Partial and Plenary indulgences? A bit of history.*

A. Attached to the recitation of certain prayers, we still find in old prayer books and stampitas expressions like “one year indulgence,” or “three years” or “five years,” etc. They are reminiscences of a past that has reached almost until nowadays.

For an explanation of it we will have to take into account first, that Jesus gave to the Church complete and unrestricted power to remove from men’s souls any impediment at all which might hold them back from heaven: sins, temporal punishment, etc. (*Mt 16:19*). And second, that the Church has exercised this power of remitting temporal punishment from the very earliest days of Christian history. In those early times, repentant sinners had to perform great penances before they would be readmitted to fellowship with the Christian community. For instance, a sinner might have to do public penance for forty days, or three years, or seven years, or even for the rest of his life — depending on the seriousness of his sins.

In 1967 Paul VI reorganized the whole matter on indulgences, simplifying them in this fashion: Indulgences which remit part of the temporal punishment due to sin are called *partial* indulgences. Indulgences which remit the whole of the temporal punishment due to sin are called *plenary* indulgences. (To understand the effect of a plenary indulgence it could be said, using catechetical language, that if we were to gain fully a plenary indulgence and were to die immediately afterwards, we would be with God in heaven immediately, without any need for atonement in purgatory).

All prayers and devotions to which indulgences — *partial* as well as *plenary* — have been attached are published in an official book of the Church called *The Enchiridion of Indulgences* (1968).

*Q. Which are the conditions to gain indulgences?*

A. Besides the general requirement of detaching ourselves from sin, there are some other conditions which have to be fulfilled in order to gain an indulgence, namely, state of sanctifying grace, performance of the prescribed work — visit to a church, cemetery, etc. or recitation of a particular prayer — plus confession and holy communion, which could be fulfilled several days before or after. A prayer for the intentions of the Holy Father is also added. It goes without saying that it is also necessary to have at least a general intention of gaining the indulgence, since the Church does not force indulgences upon us.

Let us also say that partial indulgences can be gained as often as one fulfills the prescribed conditions, while plenary indulgences can be gained only once during the day, except in the case of danger of death. In practice, however, we seldom can be certain that we have gained a plenary indulgence in its fullness, since it implies that we be *completely* detached from all deliberate sin; which means, in order words, that we have true sorrow for all venial sins as well as grave, and that we be resolved to avoid all deliberate sins in the future.

*Q. Can indulgences be gained for the dead?*

A. Yes. We can relieve their sufferings and speed them on to heaven by our prayers for them, by the Masses we offer and have offered for them, by the indulgences we gain for them. Actually, almost all indulgences granted by the Church can be applied to the souls in purgatory, if we make that intention.

Two things are clear from all the aforesaid: One, that you and I and all the members of the Church benefit constantly and immeasurably from the Communion of Saints; and Two, that this is one of the most charming and consoling dogmas of the Catholic Faith. Is it not consoling indeed to know that if ever all our honest-to-goodness efforts do not come up with the right results, our energies are not wasted at all, because if we do everything in the spirit of charity, all our seemingly futile efforts will achieve untold good and immeasurable benefits for the living and the dead? Certainly, it is.

## II. IMMERSION INTO THE COMMUNION OF SAINTS

It is commonly said that dogmas are not so much to be explained as to be believed. In other words, they have to be understood not just with our mind but mainly with our heart. This is specially true in the case of the present dogma of the Communion of Saints. It is not enough for us to just understand the meaning of the dogma; as members of the Church, we are expected to live it out, to immerse ourselves in it. For this we have to develop in ourselves a "communion of saints attitude."

What does the communion of saints mean for us in practice? It means that all of us who are united in Christ must first be mindful of the needs of one another to become builders of the Body, the Church.

This has important consequences and involves profound renewal of mind and heart both at the personal and at the social level. The latter has to be related mainly to our own concrete present situation in the Philippines.

## 1. Builders of Christian Brotherhood

"I believe in God, but not in the Church," we hear people often say. And I ask: "What is the Church?" The Vatican? No, the Vatican is not the "Church." The bishops and priests? They are only a small portion of it. Then, what? The Church is the community of believers, the people of God, the whole "family" of God, you and me who were baptized and became members in the same body and under the same Head.

Confronted with existing divisions among Christian Churches and even among members of the Catholic Church, we wonder: "Is there in fact such a reality as the "community of believers" or the "family of God"?"

"Yes," I do not hesitate to answer. It is just that this family, in its human aspect, is broken, divided, and sick. Each of us is responsible for such deplorable condition -- we have been negligent in our task as builders of Christian brotherhood. Yet, it is not too late for introspection and action.

### *A Community of Believers?*

An old story goes this way: A missionary in Africa was called to baptize an old dying patriarch. The catechist prepared him for the reception of the sacrament, teaching him that with baptism he would go to heaven and be with the angels and saints and all the baptized.

After greeting him with words of encouragement and comfort, the priest began the baptismal ceremony and asked the old man: "Do you want to be baptized and go to heaven?" "Well, I have thought it over, and I have decided that I don't want to anymore." "Why not? What has happened to you?" "Father, I don't know anyone in heaven. In hell, I have friends and relatives and all my ancestors who died without baptism."



The man in the story had a point: If in heaven there is no community — no love, no communion — then it is not heaven.

A community is characterized by communion, by love. The Church is a community. And if in the Church there is no communion, no love, then it is not a Church, it is not a community.

Many of our churches are well-built, highly-organized. On Sundays, they are filled with thousands of Mass-goers, throngs of people from all walks of life. In most cases, these assemblies are pervaded by indifference, anonymity, lack of rapport, and absence of spiritual sharing. In each parish there are thousands of Christians who neither know each other nor maintain any type of relationship with one another. In such a lifestyle, it is impossible to visualize a human community as a tangible sign of fraternal love.

Originally the Church was a community of believers “with one soul and one heart.” Could people say nowadays, as they did in the early Church, “See how these Christians love one another” (Ac)? If the apostles were to come back today, would they recognize the Church as an evangelical, liberating and healing community?

If the Church is not what it should be, it is due to our selfishness that destroys communion and renders the Church a *broken* family.

### *The Broken Family of God*

Most of the divisions in our Christian Community are the result of our failure to appreciate and respect others in their true dignity as human persons and children of God. Some of the wrong attitudes we have of ourselves and others are *victimization, blaming it on others, selfishness*:

#### (1) VICTIMIZATION (Self-pity)

One day a mother suddenly bursts: “I’ve had enough! I’ve been your servant all these years and you haven’t realized it even now! I’ve sacrificed my life while you enjoyed yourselves!”

This mother feels she is a victim... one who has sacrificed herself for her family... one who thinks that she has been taken for granted... one who has been exploited... and she resents all of these.

Strangely, each one of us, at one time or another, has felt being in this mother's shoes: a victim of someone or something. Perhaps a childhood without affection, inhuman condition of work, a badly paid employment, work not fully appreciated, honors not awarded...

And the reaction: How can I love my brother who sees me working day after day and repays me with indifference, and even with derision? Why should I still work with enthusiasm when someone not deserving has been appointed superior? How can I love...? In fact, I no longer love. I am unable to. Since love is the reason for my existence, my inability to love leaves me without peace and overwhelms me with a feeling of indifference.

"Indifference" is the word. Indifference is the kind of relationship among Christians. I should love my neighbor (brother), but the truth is that I do not bother. He is a stranger to me. Furthermore, I resent him because he differs from me. He is even an "enemy" whom I hate because he is exploiting me...

This is the attitude of many of us toward God when we simply feel that 'He is' unfair. "I've been so good, I pray much, say my rosaries and novenas, I go to Mass every Sunday, I belong to the Legion of Mary... yet God does not do anything to remove this suffering from me." And the feeling of resentment grows with the years.

Then self-pity creeps in. Feeling sorry for ourselves, we bar ourselves from God's love and from others. Victims. Self-outcasts.

And strangest of all is that we rather tend to enjoy being victims!

## (2) BLAMING IT ON OTHERS

We blame others for everything: it's always their fault. Never or very seldom ourselves. Pride? Bad faith? Blindness?

When this attitude becomes a habit or even a "need," the matter is serious. Nothing is more destructive for a person or for a Community. When I blame others for everything, indeed I destroy love and community. I bring about division and opposition.

In any way, all of us have the tendency to look at the speck in our brother's eye, but pay no attention to the log in our own eye. We claim

to have the right to judge, to criticize, to murmur about what others are and do. This self-deception is dangerous.

Even when wrong, I deceive myself into thinking that I am doing right and good. Like King David, I become furious with the rich man who stole the poor man's lamb, without realizing that I myself am the man (cf. 2 S 12:1-7). Is this not a mirror of what happens in our Christian community every day?

### (3) SELFISHNESS AND SIN

Is something wrong with human nature? It seems that we all are selfish from birth. Selfishness opposes love; it is a refusal. As such, it is perhaps the best definition of sin. Sin involves the lack of love. In fact, sin is a failure to love and appreciate others in their true dignity as human persons and children of God.

Sin is a product of man's free will. It is freely disobeying God and rejecting the way of life he has laid down for us. It is ourselves in the center and making our own wrong choices.

This rupture with God leads tragically to division among brothers: division between individuals and groups, painful divisions in the Church and in the world.

Most of us, Christians, are *accomplices* in the social sin of the world today: the trampling upon the basic rights of human beings, starting with the right to life (think of the case of abortion); hidden attacks against the freedom of individuals and communities; the use of torture; the stockpiling of atomic weapons; the various forms of discrimination, violence and terrorism; an unfair distribution of the world's resources, etc.

On a more private level, our lives are sometimes a real scandal for those around us: drunkenness, irresponsible sexual behaviour, violence at home, destructive words, injustice, anger, theft, negligence in duties, etc.

And we cannot forget that every sin, even the most hidden one, really hurts the whole body of Christ, the Christian community, whether every one in the community is conscious of it or not. Sin indeed causes pain, division and misery. Sin destroys community. We know it too well by experience.

## *Building Christian Community*

"Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the temple of the Church," we are urged by St. Peter (*1 Pt 2:4*).

The human body is made up of millions of individual cells, all working together for the good of the whole body. The parts are many, but the body is one. Each part is equally concerned with the others. If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it. If one part is given special care all parts enjoy it. No disagreement inside the body, but all cells live and labor for all in perfect "community."

The Church is the living body of Christ: we all are members of that body, with our proper function to fulfill for the good of the whole. Our mission is to build it up.

Building up the Church or a world according to God's will? "That is absolutely hopeless," we may say, giving up in discouragement. No, it isn't. God is at work in us by the power of his Holy Spirit.

We may have reasons to shirk from responsibility, for the overwhelming multitude of broken homes, of people alienated from one another in sin, of people poor and destitute and oppressed because of the greed of others, of people seeking relief from loneliness in drugs and drink and sex abuse... Yet, it is our responsibility as individuals and as a Community to comfort, to heal, to set others free. Such is the mission of the Church, such is our mission.

And the only way to achieve authentic Christian Community and universal brotherhood is by committing ourselves to one another in fraternal love. This requires conversion, change, renewal in mind and heart. "There can be no ecumenism worth the name without interior conversion," the Vatican II reminded us.

And still more eloquently, the recent Plenary Council of the Philippines: "At the beginning of all renewed evangelization is conversion. Unless a person turns away from sin and turns to God, undergoes a change of mind and heart, and decides to follow Christ, no evangelization will bear fruit" (*Acts and Decrees*, 156).

## (1) RENEWAL OF MIND AND HEART

The Church is not just an exclusively juridical organization; it is rather a living Community, a big family — the family of God — of which we are members.

Love is the reason for our existence. We cannot go on living in isolation, in sin, in anger. "The sunset must not find us still angry." For many of us, I'm afraid, such is the case. That is why sometimes we are *living* dead, withered branches, unable to bear fruit.

It is a time to restore our Christian family. Alienation, isolation, broken homes, broken relationships have produced a lonely mankind. We need a community. Loving human relationships, respect for persons, respect for life itself. And we can fill these needs only by a full restoration of the Christian family life in our basic communities. Thus our task of renewing the world in love has to start by renewing ourselves and by building the "domestic" Church where we are.

## (2) BUILDING OUR OWN "DOMESTIC" CHURCH

Since a Christian community is the extension and fullness of Christian family life, our mission is to make our own family and religious group a real *community* of love, concern, appreciation, prayer, reconciliation, faith -with the same characteristics of the Early Church:

— *a community of love and caring*: The most beautiful example is that of Jesus washing the Apostles' feet. "If I, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you should wash each other's feet. I have given you an example" (Jn 13:5). Community is the fullness of home. And home is where everybody is appreciated as a person, having been made in God's own image and likeness, and where everyone is allowed to grow as a human being.

— *a community of concern for others*: In the early Church the members stayed together in close fellowship, even sharing their belonging with one another (cf. Ac 2:43). It was much more than a Church-going congregation! A spirit of love united them so much so that if one suffered all suffered. A supreme ideal for our own communities!

— *a community of mutual appreciation*: Appreciation for one another is a key element in all genuine community life. It is the fullness of every truly human relationship. Appreciation means more than being grateful for the services others render to us; it means enjoying one another's presence. It requires a time of togetherness.

— *a community of prayer*: The family that prays together stays together. And the reason is that the Lord is right in its midst. (Praying is appreciating the Lord together.) The basic reason for the failure of many families and religious communities to be as powerful as they should be in building mankind into a universal brotherhood is the neglect of community prayer. To worship God together and to pray for one another are basic needs, and signs of courtesy. Too busy? Tired? "Come to me all of you who are overburdened and I will give you rest..." (Mt 11:28).

— *a community of reconciliation*: Forgiveness is God's gift bestowed on everyone. Each little boy can forgive his little sister who has hurt him. Each daughter can forgive her mother who has been negligent. Parents can forgive their children for having been disobedient. Each husband can forgive his wife. Each wife can forgive her mother-in-law. Each priest can forgive his co-priest and each Sister can forgive her Mother Superior for her mistakes. Each young adult can forgive the generations which have gone before him. It's not enough for God to forgive sinners; we too must forgive and receive each other. There is no other way to be at peace. How can we become a reconciling community if individually we are not first "reconciled"?

— *a community of faith*: A real community of believers. Faith is not belief in something, but belief and trust in Someone. Faith is the gift of knowing that there is a Father who loved us and who has been with us from the very beginning. His unseen presence is manifested in the Church in three fundamental ways: in the proclamation of God's word, in the Sacrament of the breaking of the bread, and in the fraternal love uniting his children as brothers and sisters. Faith is proclaiming that "there is one God and Father of all men, who is Lord of all, works through all and is in all."

We can neither anymore say, "I believe in God but not in the Church" nor "I do not believe in man." When we believe in God, we cannot but believe in his Church. And because we believe in the Church, we

believe in man, in ourselves. Our vocation is to become builders of Christian brotherhood.

## **2. Building up the "Community of Disciples" in the Philippines today**

In fact, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP-II) and the ASIAN Congress on Evangelization (1991 and 1992 respectively) opened under the sign of the proximity of a new millennium. And as we are crossing the threshold of the new millennium we have the feeling that something important is coming to an end. But at the same time we have also before us a variety of options probably still more challenging than those faced by our predecessors in the past. The millennium we are about to start is absolutely unpredictable, completely new and radically different. The new times we have already started are demanding from us a courageous, positive and new answer. We will have to be in our present world the heralds not so much of the "new evangelization" (John Paul II) as the heralds of an "evangelization that is new" (Card. Martini). What is difficult is not to undertake a new evangelization but to evangelize in a new way. Here it is found the great challenge of our society to the Philippine Church.

The *Acts and Decrees* of the PCP-II draw a clear picture of the present Philippine reality as well as of the challenges that emerge from such a situation. Looking at them in a superficial way we might find even reasons for discouragement. There is always the temptation to find refuge in the past, to think that "any past period was better..." But, being faithful to our Christian vocation, we all know that this is not the way, that discouragement does not lead to anywhere. On the contrary, challenging situations demand enthusiastic and positive answers, being unity and participation two keywords to the solution of our problems.

### *The Challenges of the Present Situation*

Which are the challenges posed to the faith by the present Philippine situation? In the view of PCP-II, *four* are the major ones:

(1) The *economic* challenge, emerging from the existing mass poverty and underdevelopment, from the great gap between rich and

poor in the country, and from injustices in the social and economic order.

(2) The *political* challenge, posed to Christianity by the lack of political power among the poor, the concentration of power in the elite, and the lack therefore of a truly representative democracy.

(3) The *cultural* challenge, posed by cultural values that are ambivalent, having dominant negative aspects within them.

(4) The challenge of *religious beliefs and practices*, posed by so called "split-level Christianity," the dichotomies of faith and life, the serious inadequacy of putting religious convictions into practice, the ritualism, individualism and privatism of religious faith.

Such are the pastoral challenges to Filipino Christianity, to which Filipino Catholics are called to respond both as individuals and as a Church.

Based on them the PCP-II made the crucial decisions that we need to announce the Gospel in a new way ("*A Renewed Integral Evangelization*"), and that there is an urgent need of forming a new breed of Christians ("*Renewed Pastoral Workers of Evangelization*"). Christians who, guided and led by their faith, may give the appropriate responses and effectively share in the Lord's work of refashioning a new way of being a person transformative of Philippine society. The process and results of such a renewal would be what PCP-II itself determined, namely, that *the Laity be truly empowered, that Religious be truly prophetic, and that Priests and Bishops be servant-leaders*.

### *The Directions of Renewal*

If the vision of PCP-II concerns the kind of Church that must engage itself with the needs of people and of society, the directions of renewal will have to deal with the areas that will create such a Church.

Bishop Orlando Quevedo, O.M.I., in a recent address to Filipino priests (cf. *Philippiniana Sacra*, XXIX, 85 (1994) 99-107) identified the following as the main and most urgent trends of renewal:



## 1. TOWARDS AUTHENTIC DISCIPLESHIP

This change requires the eradication of the dichotomies that characterize Catholic life in the Philippines, such as: a privatistic view of religion ("my religion is a private affair between me and God and does not concern the business of others"); a ritualistic view of faith ("attending rites and devotions are enough, their practical implications on private and social behavior are not necessary"); an individualistic view of morality ("social sins are not matters for confession").

The renewal will be the shift from disciples in name to disciples in deed. Thus attaining a genuine discipleship in the social, economic, political, and cultural spheres.

## 2. TOWARDS COMMUNITY

Discipleship is lived in community. But we are aware of various realities that are divisive of community (*e.g.*, vested interests, economic, social and cultural divisions).

The movement of change will require to emphasize the essential community dimension of Christian life, a renewed social apostolate that would facilitate initiatives in community building, and a renewed liturgy which would underline the element of community, the loving, sharing, serving aspects of worship and of the sacraments. The end result of such a movement should be discipleship lived in an authentic community — towards the building of community.

## 3. TOWARDS CO-RESPONSIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION

We are also aware of the lack of participation of the laity in decision-making processes at the parish level, of the clergy, religious and laity at the diocesan level.

Obviously the movement will require a re-education of all. Of the laity, so that awareness of their roles and charisms will impel them to be active in all affairs of the Church and in society. Of the Clergy and Religious, so that they may facilitate the empowerment of the laity through the giving up of many responsibilities that heretofore they have considered as their preserve. Of Bishops, so that they may become the symbol of unity in Christ, coordinating the various charisms of clergy, religious, and laity activated for the building up of the community.

#### 4. TOWARDS A PREFERENTIAL OPTION FOR THE POOR

God's love in the Old Testament as well as in the New in the person of Jesus, was a love of preference for the poor. Such love has been described by Pope John Paul II as an obligatory option. This is the love which will enable the Church to become a Church of the Poor. Yet it is a radical form of love that requires a profound conversion. Even as I consider the Church as the Poor as the most radical of our vision of Church, so do I consider this movement towards preferential option for the poor the most radical. This is a very daunting task.

#### 5. TOWARDS AN INCULTURATED CHURCH

Inculturation will require in the area of catechesis the teaching of the faith with serious consideration given to the cultural values of farmers and fishermen, of Tribal Filipinos, slum dwellers, and *sacadas* — in other words, the Filipino culture of poverty. Here, intellectual understanding counts considerably much less than concrete lived experience. The pedagogical method of Jesus announcing the Gospels by using concrete imagery and events and the cultural elements of his time would be a model.

In the area of liturgy and worship, attempts must be made to bring the liturgy of life, its hopes and struggles, into the people's formal worship of God. In the area of the social apostolate, work must be done towards purifying, strengthening, renewing and reinforcing, as the case may be, the cultural values that make for integral development.

The end result of such changes would be a Filipino faith precisely as struggling in a situation of poverty and deprivation, a faith that strives towards a more abundant life.

#### 6. TOWARDS INTEGRAL SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality is "walking in the Spirit," "remaining in the Spirit," "abiding in the Spirit," "living in the Spirit." These are various ways by which the letters of St. Paul and St. John describe union with God, which is holiness. This, too, is the way PCP-II describes the common spirituality of all believers which manifests itself in various forms for lay people, for religious, and for the clergy.

The operative word here is "integral." It means that spirituality is a way of living in the Spirit in all spheres of life, social, economic, political, cultural and religious. No phase of life is divorced from spirituality. Thus should we speak of holiness and spirituality in business, in politics, in the world of work, etc., for an integral spirituality will require the proper integration of the profane and the sacred, of the marketplace and the sanctuary, of work and prayer, of life and worship.

## CONCLUSION

How can we build up a Church that be truly an effective evangelizer and a leaven in the contemporary Philippine society? Through a profound renewal of its members; renewal that involves a personal conversion of values and life-styles, which in turn will give way to new processes and structures within the Church.

This means that a great act of faith is requested from us. A faith and a hope beyond hope. In the end we know that only those who believe will be the ones to conquer the world and to create a future that has already started. The Risen Lord is in our midst with His fruits of encouragement, joy, peace, forgiveness and faith. Everything is possible to the one who believes. Listening to God's voice and turning our hearts to Him mean preparing a future that grows up day by day.

That is why in the process of renewal the Holy Spirit has to be the main builder, for "...unless the Lord builds the house, in vain do its builders labour" (*Ps 127,1*). And the place where the Spirit gathers us all together in communion is the Eucharist, which is the center of the Communion of Saints.

**REFERENCES:** *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (on the Creed's article 'The Communion of Saints'); Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion*, Rome May 28, 1992; The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, *Acts and Decrees*, (Manila, 1992); Leo J. Trese, *The Faith Explained*, Sinag-Tala Publishers, Manila, 1991 ed., pp.145-147 and 389-396; Guillermo Tejón, O.P., "I believe in the Communion of Saints," *Life Today*, (November 1993), 26-30; Josias N Palarca, "In the company of Saints," *Life Today* (October 1985), 22-23; Javier González, O.P., "Builders of Christian Brotherhood," *Life Today* (October, 1985), 18-21; Orlando B. Quevedo, O.M.I., "The Directions of Pastoral Renewal in the Philippines" in *Philippiniana Sacra*, vol. XXIX, 85 (Jan-April 1994), 99-107.

## **Statement on Father Cirilo Nacorda and the Abu Sayyaf**

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*Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines*

Peace is a common aspiration of Filipino Christians and Muslims and of all persons of goodwill. This peace was severely fractured when Father Cirilo Nacorda, a diocesan priest working in the Prelature of Isabela, Basilan, was kidnapped with many others in Barangay Sampinit, Isabela, Basilan, on June 8, 1994. At least 15 of Father Nacorda's companions were mercilessly shot to death by their Abu Sayyaf captors. The others were kept hostage and released only after money was paid to the kidnappers. Father Nacorda himself has remained in captivity and his life always hangs on a thin thread of uncertainty.

We, as a Conference, wish to express our solidarity with the Church in Basilan, Bishop Romulo de la Cruz, and the family of Father Nacorda who share with him the heavy burden of a common cross. And we pray for the safe return of Father Nacorda.

We pray too that God may touch the hearts of his kidnappers so that they may realize their wrongdoing which we condemn even as we pray for them. Father Nacorda is a man of peace. He is in Basilan only to serve God and to uplift and unite his fellow human beings whatever be their religion. In so wantonly hurting or killing their victims and keeping Father Nacorda hostage, the Abu Sayyaf kidnappers have severely hurt their own cause. All persons of good will, be they Muslims or Christians, must condemn such criminal acts unworthy of civilized people. We appeal to his kidnappers in the name of our common humanity and in the name of the One Merciful and Just God

whom we worship to release their captive.

We are also aware that other civilians, including our peace-loving Muslim brothers and sisters, have also been affected by these atrocities of the Abu Sayyaf. Due to the military operations which were their aftermath, civilians have been forced to flee for their lives, leaving their properties behind. This has given some people opportunities to steal or destroy these properties.

We pray for the return of normalcy and peace to Basilan. May the roots of the tensions and bloodshed that have time and again ravaged that beautiful island and its people be reached and changed by the grace of God and the good will of the people who live there. May vigilante groups not take matters into their own hands in revenge. May healing and forgiveness take place among them and peace prevail once more.

We appeal to our government officials to do everything in their power to right the wrongs and to neutralize the forces that lie at the root of these troubles. Let them restore again the faith of the people in government and their trust in each other.

And to the people of Basilan, especially to the families of the massacre victim and the parishioners of Matarling, we say: We, your brothers, the Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, share your sufferings and wish to reach out to you through our prayers. May God give you peace and security. May Mary obtain from her Son the breaking down of all animosities of all hostilities.

For the Catholic Bishops'  
Conference of the Philippines:

(Sgd.) Most Rev. Carmelo D.F. Morelos, D.D.  
President, CBCP

Tagaytay City  
July 10, 1994

## **Pastoral Statement on the Cairo International Conference on Population and Development**

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*Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines*

Dear Brothers and Sisters in the Lord:

Greetings of Love and Life from the Lord!

Cairo. For most Filipinos it is only the name of Egypt's capital. But come September 1994, it will be the place where representatives of various nations, gathered for the International Conference on Population and Development, will make decisions that will deeply influence family life throughout the world and thus the future of humanity. There are deep and well-founded forebodings that this influence will not be positive — it can be a betrayal of humanity. Decisions and resolutions may be made there that will promote a radical change in the concept of what a family is, foster sexual license among the unmarried, and open even wider avenues to the evil of abortion.

Because of the importance of this Conference, we have deemed it necessary to write a letter to our President regarding the Philippine representatives to the Conference and the stand which they, as our people's representatives, should uphold.

We have asked our government to let us know the identity of our country's delegates, the criteria according to which they were chosen, and, more importantly, the positions they have been instructed to uphold. We have also requested the President to hear our opinion on the delegates our government is thinking to send.

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The President already knows well the Catholic position against direct contraception, direct sterilization and direct abortion. For this particular conference, in solidarity with the Holy Father, Pope John Paul II, we have deemed it especially necessary to ask that our representatives to Cairo present positions that are consonant with our Constitution, our culture, and the religious heritage of the overwhelming majority of our people.

In particular, we asked:

That, in harmony with our Constitution and our Family Code, they uphold and defend the sanctity of the family, founded on marriage between a man and a woman, as the basic unit of society;

That they present a consistently pro-life stance, uphold the value of human life and children, and defend the right to life of every individual, from conception to its natural end. We expect them to be uncompromising against direct abortion and point out that in our Constitution, the State is mandated to "equally protect the life of the mother and the unborn from conception" (Art. 2, Sec. 12). A society that does not protect its weakest but kills them is a dehumanized society;

That they also uphold the truth that marriage is the only morally legitimate setting for the exercise of the sexual act and the procreation of children, and

That they uphold the primacy of persons over things, of being over having. The worth of a person is not measured by what he/she has but by his/her capacity to give of self in service.

We emphatically asked that our representatives represent our country in Cairo as free people who prophetically witness to the truths that humanize and to reject that type of imperialism which subjugates and determines the future of peoples by money.

We call on you, our people, to bear witness to Christian family values in your daily living and to pray and fast fervently that in this family year, those same values may indeed be defended and triumph in Cairo.

May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph defend us from evil and help obtain for us life in its fullness.

For the Catholic Bishops'  
Conference of the Philippines:

(Sgd.) Most Rev. Carmelo D.F. Morelos, D.D.  
President, CBCP

Tagaytay City  
July 10, 1994



## Letter to the President

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*Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines*

July 11, 1994

His Excellency  
PRESIDENT FIDEL V. RAMOS  
Republic of the Philippines  
Malacañang, Manila

Dear President Ramos:

Greetings of Love and Life from the Lord!

As an expression of our pastoral concern for the total human development of our people, we, as pastors of the Catholic faithful in the Philippines, want to write to you about the International Conference on Population and Development, to be held in Cairo in September, 1994. It is expected that in this Conference, decisions will be taken that will deeply influence family life throughout the world and thus the future of humanity. There are deep and well-founded forebodings that this influence will not be positive — it can be a betrayal of humanity. Decisions and resolutions may be made there that will promote a radical change in the concept of what a family is, foster sexual license among the unmarried, and open even wider avenues to the evil of abortion.

Like other citizens, we want to know the identity of our country's delegates, the criteria according to which they were or will be

chosen, and, more importantly, the positions they will be instructed to uphold. If it is not too late yet, we would like to express our opinion on the persons who will represent the country.

Mr. President, you already know the Church's opposition to direct contraception, direct sterilization and direct abortion. But especially for the Cairo Conference, we ask that our representatives present positions that are consonant with our Constitution, our culture, and the religious heritage of the overwhelming majority of our people. In particular, we ask:

That, in harmony with our Constitution and Family Code, they uphold and defend the sanctity of the family, *founded on marriage between a man and a woman as the basic unit of society*;

That they present a consistently pro-life stance, uphold the value of human life and children, and defend the right to life of every individual, from conception to its natural end. We expect them to be uncompromising against direct abortion and point out that in our Constitution, the State is mandated to "equally protect the life of the mother and the unborn from conception" (Art. 2, Sec. 12). A society that does not protect its weakest but kills them is a dehumanized society;

That they also uphold the truth that marriage is the only morally legitimate setting for the exercise of the sexual act and the procreation of children; and

That they uphold the primacy of persons over things, of being over having. The worth of a person is not measured by what he/she has but by his/her capacity to give of self in service.

We emphatically ask that our representatives represent our country in Cairo as free people who prophetically witness to the truths that humanize and to reject that type of imperialism which subjugates and determines the future of peoples by money.

May the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph defend our families from evil and help obtain for us life in its fullness.

Expressing to you our highest esteem and prayerful best wishes,  
we are

Sincerely yours in the Service  
of our People,

For the Catholic Bishops'  
Conference of the Philippines

(Sgd.) Most Rev. Carmelo D.F. Morelos, D.D.  
President, CBCP

## **Pastoral Statement on Taxation and the Expanded Value Added Tax (R.A. 7716)**

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*Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines*

The total human development of our people is at the heart of the Church's mission, whose founder, Jesus Christ, came that we might have life and have it in abundance (*Jn 10:10*). Hence we cannot be unconcerned with the present agitation aroused by R.A. 7716 or the expanded VAT Law. We, your bishops, are not economists. Still less are we tax experts. But we are shepherds committed to promoting the total well-being of our people, and as shepherds we must have a concern for what leads — or does not lead — to the total well-being of our people, especially the poor. It is in the light of this concern that we would like to speak, not only on R.A. 7716 as such but on a deeper issue: the reform of our whole system of taxation.

We start with two basic principles:

1. The government has a right to impose and collect taxes provided these taxes are just; correspondingly the citizen has a duty to pay taxes faithfully, honestly (*Rm 13:6-7*).
2. The monies collected must be used by government for the common good, providing such services are needed for the public welfare, not for the selfish and capricious consumption of those in power.

Applying these principles to the Philippines today, we note these only too obvious facts of our situation:

1. Our tax structure and the system of tax collection are in some need of reform. Our taxes are regressive, that is, they are slanted against the poor, the heavier burden being put on their shoulders, not on those of the better-off sectors of our population.

2. The pervasiveness of graft and corruption in government spawns two interconnected evils: the improper collection of taxes due; the non-provision of badly needed public services.

Keeping the above principles and facts in mind, we ask ourselves what can be done to institute necessary reforms. The following questions come to mind:

1. Is the expanded VAT Law just one more step on the direction of strengthening our tax structure's bias against the poor; or conversely, does it remedy that bias?

2. Does it effectively safeguard against corrupt and dishonest practices in the paying (or avoidance of paying) of taxes, improve in truth their collection?

As Christian citizens we must address these questions in depth, come up with some answers that will fully satisfy the principles we started out with and correct the present infirmities of our tax system.

We urge a thorough review of R.A. 7716 when Congress convenes precisely with these questions in mind, and we ask that our people be consulted and informed about its provisions so that any inequitable aspects may be eliminated, and the consent of the people obtained. For only when the people are allowed to participate in the decisions that affect them can we speak of genuine people empowerment.

For the Catholic Bishops'  
Conference of the Philippines:

(Sgd.) Most Rev. Carmelo D.F. Morelos, D.D.  
President, CBCP

Tagaytay City  
July 10, 1994

## Let Us Save Our Children

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*Arzobispado de Manila*

Is it true that the Department of Education, Culture and Sports is set to distribute to the different schools nationwide a pornographic cartoon to teach our children from Grade Four to Fourth Year high school sex?

The right thinking parents who saw this pornographic cartoon being circulated by the DECS told me that they felt themselves going numb seeing the video. They admitted being shocked.

This is outrageous.

This very degrading form of education is a shame to our society. If our government authorities do not see anything wrong with this pornographic cartoon, what has happened to morality?

If the government is bent on educating our children about sex so that we can use our sexual faculties responsibly, this cartoon is certainly the best way not to achieve the goal. Rather than educating, it spoils sex. Rather than enlightening, it blurs our vision about the design of God in creating man and woman.

From being a nation of highway robbers and tax evaders, from being a nation of grafters and filmfest fiascos, we are now becoming a nation of sex exploiters.

That the government neglects the poor and imposes taxes that are detrimental to their need is bad enough. That this government disregards our Catholic sensibilities by an outright promotion of

contraceptives is bad enough. That citizens cannot walk the streets of the Philippines without fear that they will be robbed, killed or raped is bad enough. That we cannot even enjoy the benefits of safe drinking water is bad enough.

But this offense against our children is just too much. This is a crime against the whole nation. This crime is crying to heaven for vengeance. Years from now, the children who were malformed by this outrageous program will lead the nation into greater moral decay.

Is it not ridiculous that the government that is supposed to protect our children is the same body that is now making available materials to destroy their moral values?

Is this all that we can offer our young?

I call on all men and women of good will to come together to prevent this material from circulation.

I fear for our children.

Please save our children from this program and let us save our children from this hell!

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

14 July 1994

## Cases and Inquiries

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Excelso G. Garcia, O.P.

### IS MASS INTENTION TO BE ANNOUNCED TO THE CONGREGATION?

*There are some parishioners who believe that if the name or names of the faithful departed for whom the Mass is offered are not publicly announced or mentioned within the Mass, the Holy Sacrifice is not really applied for them. Logically, they do not offer any Mass, unless they are quite sure that the names will be announced to the congregation attending the Mass. What do you say about this?*

*A young Priest*

We have to distinguish two different things on this matter, namely: the priest's intention to apply the Mass for the faithful departed, according to the donor's desire, and the express public mention of the name or names of the dead during the Mass. Let us examine each of these things separately.

*Intention of priest to apply the Mass.* It is a most praiseworthy custom of the faithful to offer a stipend for the application of the Mass for their beloved departed or for their own needs. Canon 901 approves this laudable custom, by saying: "A priest is entitled to offer Mass for anyone, living or dead." The difference is that the Mass offered for the dead is offered by way of suffrage, while the Mass for the living is offered by way of petition, such as for someone's conversion, spiritual welfare, restoration of health, or as a thanksgiving for favors the donors received from God.



It is necessary that the priest who offers the Mass makes his intention to offer it for the benefit of a living person or as suffrage for the souls departed, for which he has received a stipend or offering, in order that the Mass' fruits be applied to such purpose. The fruits or benefits of the Holy Mass to the souls are fourfold, namely:

a) *General*, that benefit all the faithful, living or dead. The Holy Sacrifice is offered for expanding and consolidating God's kingdom here on earth and for the conversion of sinners.

b) *Special*, that the faithful who assist at and actively participate in the Mass receive, in proportion to their faith, confidence and devotion.

c) *Personal*, received by the priest celebrating the Holy Sacrifice, according to his own dispositions.

d) *Ministerial*, that benefit those for whom the Holy Sacrifice is particularly offered. The Mass can be offered for special needs of persons still alive, as well as for souls in Purgatory. When the Holy Mass is offered for a certain dead person who is already in heaven, the *ministerial* fruit of the Mass is applied to the donor of the stipend offered for the Mass. It is presumed that the donor's intention is to help himself, if the soul for whom the Mass was offered does not need to be helped. Mass can also be offered in honor of the Saints and to obtain their intercession and protection before God.

The priest's intention to offer the Mass for the donor's will is an internal act of the priest who offers the Holy Sacrifice, and as such it is sufficient in itself in order that the beneficiary living or dead for whom the Mass is applied be benefited by the Mass offered. The priest should make this intention before the Mass or at least before the consecration.

To offer the Mass for the souls of the departed does not require that the Mass to be said be the Mass liturgically proper for the Dead; any Mass can be offered for them. The offering priest should consider what the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* says: "The Mass for the Dead should be used sparingly. Every Mass is offered for both the living and the dead, and there is a remembrance of the dead in each Eucharistic Prayer" (n.316).

*Public mention of the name of the departed.* The public mention, within the Mass, of the name of the departed faithful for whom the

Mass is offered, should not be confused or identified with the priest's intention in offering the Mass. The latter can exist without the former, not the opposite. The priest's intention to offer the Mass for a departed soul is an internal act, as explained above. Its exteriorization or its being made public, however, implies the previous existence of the priest's intention. No public announcement of the priest's intention can be done if such intention does not exist already.

The priest's intention, known already by God, is sufficient for applying to the dead or living concerned the portion of infinite value of the Mass offered, according to God's design.

The intention of the priest alone being sufficient notwithstanding, the actual general practice in the Church is to make public to the congregation attending the Mass that the Holy Sacrifice is offered for a certain departed soul or living person. Such custom should be maintained for various reasons.

The four Eucharistic Prayers contain the remembrance of the dead: in three of them the possibility of mentioning the name or names of the departed concerned is expressed. In the first Eucharistic Prayer the rubric says: "With hands extended he (the priest) says: Remember, Lord those who have died and gone before us with the sign of faith, especially those for whom we now pray, N. and N." In the second Eucharistic Prayer the rubric reads: "In Masses for the dead the following may be added: Remember N., whom you have called from this life. In baptism he (she) died with Christ: may he (she) also share His resurrection." In the third Eucharistic Prayer we read: "When this Eucharistic Prayer is used in Masses for the dead, the following may be said: Remember N. In baptism he (she) died with Christ: may he (she) also share His resurrection ....." There is no such provision in the fourth Eucharistic Prayer.

The public remembrance of the soul of the departed within the Mass, reminds us in a simple and effective way that our communion with them is still alive, as well as fostering and consolidating our faith and hope to meet them some say in heaven, where they have joined the great family of those redeemed by Christ, who died for us and rose from the dead as our eternal Lord and God.

The public announcement of the name or names of the souls departed for whom the Mass is offered can be done at the beginning

of the Mass, so that those who will participate in the Holy Sacrifice can also include their personal intentions. This does not impede that an express mention of the name be made by the offering priest within the liturgical Eucharistic Prayer, giving this remembrance a particular religious meaning, as General Instruction of the Missal Roman says: "The Church offers the Paschal Sacrifice for the dead so that, through the fellowship of all Christ members, some obtain spiritual help for others, some obtain the consolation of hope."

## SACRAMENTAL PENANCE

*A few days ago the Faculty of our College had a Holy Retreat. One of the topics was the Sacrament of Penance. The Retreat Master explained the five requirements for a good confession. But I could not understand some points concerning the last requirement, the fulfillment of the penance. He said that the fulfillment of the penance imposed by the Confessor does not belong to the essence of the sacrament of confession, since the absolution or remission of sins precedes the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of the penance imposed upon the penitent by the Confessor. Some of my companions seemed to be equally confused and one of them dared to say that in the future he will not bother about the fulfillment of the penance anymore, since he prays the Rosary, visits the Holy Sacrament daily and makes the Way of the Cross every Friday. He prays much more than what the Confessor imposes upon him as penance for his sins.*

*May I know your opinion on the fulfillment of the sacramental penance?*

*A Professor of Religion*

The explanation of sacramental penance given by the Retreat Master mentioned by our Consultant was not complete. He failed to make a basic distinction between the penitent's *acceptance* of the penance imposed by the Confessor and its *fulfillment*. Likewise, the companion of the consultant professor failed to understand that a prayer or good work imposed by the Confessor as a penance has a lower value when it is performed on the penitent's own initiative. We will try to elaborate on the nature of sacramental penance.

Considering the penitent alone, the sacrament of Penance is made up of the three essential parts that constitute the *proximate matter* of the sacrament, namely true sorrow for the sins committed, confession of sins and satisfaction through the penance imposed by the Confessor. This was the teaching of the Council of Florence (R. Deferrari, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, n.699).

*Sacramental satisfaction* is the prayer or good work imposed by the Confessor upon the penitent in order to repair the offense to God for sins committed, confessed and remitted through the Confessor's absolution. It has a satisfying effect by virtue of the sacrament itself (*ex opere operato*), according to the penitent's disposition.

The sacramental satisfaction is an act of the penitent required by the virtue of justice and its purpose is to appease the infinite dignity of God. Since all human satisfaction is imperfect, it cannot be said to be an act of strict justice, because it is impossible for any human being to pay adequately for the offense committed. Thus sacramental satisfaction will always be finite and limited according to the personal disposition of the penitent.

At first glance it seems that any human satisfaction for sins committed against God is impossible due to the fact that the offense is infinite to some extent, because it is an offense to the infinite dignity of God. However, taking into account the infinite mercy of God and the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, man can satisfy for his own sins and for the sins of others as well.

Protestants deny this truth when they say that the whole penalty due to sin is forgiven by God at the moment that its guilt is pardoned by Him, and thus human satisfaction is nothing else than our faith in Christ's satisfaction for our sins. This error was expressly rejected by the Council of Trent, saying: "If anyone says that the whole punishment, together with the guilt, is always pardoned by God, and that the satisfaction of penitents is nothing else than faith, by which they perceive that Christ has made satisfaction for them, let him be anathema" (R. Defferari, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 922).

Sacramental satisfaction in as much as it is a constituent part of the sacrament of Penance, is necessary for the sacrament's validity and licitness. Hence it must exist in the will and desire of the penitent who wants to do whatever is possible to obtain God's forgiveness.

Thus the penitent's *acceptance* or his *non-refusal* of the penance imposed by the Confessor should be present before the absolution is given. Its actual and real fulfillment is only necessary for the integrity of the sacrament, not for its validity. In other words, the voluntary non-fulfillment of the sacramental satisfaction will be a mortal or venial sin according to the gravity of the penance imposed by the Confessor upon the penitent; but the non-fulfillment of the sacramental penance does not invalidate the sacrament already received. The ill disposition of the penitent that follows the absolution of his sins does not have a retroactive effect on the sacrament already received.

Any good work having a penal or satisfying value can be imposed as sacramental penance upon the penitent. St. Thomas says that satisfaction should be of such a nature as to involve something taken away from us for the honor of God. He reduces all kinds of satisfaction to three groups: a) by *almsgiving* we deprived ourselves of some goods of fortune; b) by *fasting* we retrench goods of the body; c) by *prayer* we submit all our spiritual goods to God. He reasons out the suitability of this threefold kind of satisfaction considering the nature of the offense to God implied by sin, which is prevented by *prayer*, or against our neighbor which is remedied by *almsgiving*, or against ourselves which is forestalled by *fasting* (Suppl. 15,3). St. Augustine has also pointed out that *fasting* is directed against concupiscence of the eyes and *prayer* against pride of life (*Enarr.* in Ps. XLII).

It is left to the prudence of the Confessor to decide what kind of penance he should impose, taking into account the sins confessed in order to be remitted. The conditions of the penitent, who is personally bound to fulfill the penance, should also be considered (can. 981). The fulfillment of the sacramental penance, being a personal responsibility of the penitent, cannot be passed on or carried out by another person.

With a just and reasonable cause the sacramental penance can be commuted to a lighter one. The following principles should apply to such commutation:

1. The substitution cannot be done by the penitent himself. It should be done by the Confessor.

2. The Confessor who imposed the penance can, with just and reasonable cause, commute the imposed penance to another. This

happens when the fulfillment of the imposed penance becomes difficult to be carried out by the penitent. The act of commuting the sacramental penance should be done either in the confessional itself or outside without repeating the already made confession of sins.

3. A different Confessor can, with just and reasonable cause, substitute the imposed penance to another easier to be fulfilled, but it should be done only in confession. This is because the commutation of the sacramental penance is a sacramental act performed by virtue of the power to remit sins. No sacramental judgement can be exercised outside the confession itself. Whether the penitent has to declare to another Confessor his sins or not, there is no unanimous opinion among moralists.

4. A just and reasonable cause is always required to commute the sacramental penance. The power of Christ has been granted to the Church in order to build up, not to weaken or destroy the penitent's interior life. An unjustified and unreasonable commutation does not help to consolidate the state of grace of the penitent; it will rather weaken it. A just and reasonable cause may be the spiritual need of the penitent who needs a lighter or more opportune penance to avoid sin.

5. The penitent himself should request for the commutation of the penance. The Confessor, however, who comes to know in confession that the penitent has not yet fulfilled the grave penance imposed by another Confessor for some reasonable cause can propose to him the commutation for another, easier one.

The effects of sacramental satisfaction are the following:

a) its fulfillment effects *ex opere operato* (automatically) the total or partial remission of the temporal penance due to sins already remitted in confession. It has been explained above that satisfaction is one of the three acts of penitent that constitute the *proximate matter* of the Sacrament of Penance (*essential* by being accepted before the absolution, *integral* by being fulfilled after absolution). Hence, satisfaction has its intrinsic efficacy from the sacrament itself (*ex opere operato*); besides, it has also the meritorious value which the act or prayer fulfilled has in itself (*ex opere operantis*); b) the sacramental satisfaction has a special efficacy to remove the remnants or relics left in the soul by the forgiven sins and to avoid sin in the future. This means that the fulfillment of the sacramental

penance is more efficacious than the performance of the same acts on one's initiative or devotion. The Council of Trent says in this regard: "Undoubtedly sacramental satisfaction greatly restrains from sin, as by a kind of rein acts as a check, and makes penitent more cautious and vigilant in the future; it also removes the remnants of sin and destroys vicious habits acquired through acts contrary to virtue" (R. Deferrari, *Sources of the Catholic Dogma*, 904).

Finally, we deem it proper to enumerate some principles that should rule the fulfillment of the sacramental penance:

1. The penitent is duty-bound to accept and to fulfill the penance reasonably imposed, unless the contrary is proven. Likewise the non-refusal of the sacramental penance should be taken for its voluntary acceptance. Note that the *acceptance* and *fulfillment* of the sacramental penance are two different things. The *acceptance* of the penance is probably compulsory under mortal sin, even when the penance is not grave, like the one imposed for venial sins. Let us remember that its *acceptance* is one of the three acts of the penitent constituting the *proximate matter* of the sacrament itself. It will be a serious irreverence to willingly subtract one of the essential parts of the sacrament, rendering invalid the sacrament itself. What the penitent should do when the penance imposed upon him is too heavy to be fulfilled is to request the Confessor to commute it to another, but never to internally refuse it, if he really wants to be absolved from sins confessed.

The *fulfillment* of the sacramental penance is only an *integral* part of the sacrament, *not essential*. Hence the non-fulfillment, even voluntarily, does not invalidate the absolution already received. Its refusal might be a grave or venial sin, as the case maybe: it will be a mortal sin if the penance was imposed for mortal sins; venial if it was imposed for venial sins only.

2. The sacramental penance is to be fulfilled by the penitent himself in the form determined by the Confessor. The reason is obvious. Its fulfillment is an *integral* part of the *proximate matter* of the sacrament which is constituted by the penitent's acts. Pope Alexander VII rejected the following proposition: "A penitent by his own authority can substitute another person for himself to fulfill the penance imposed upon him" (R. Deferrari, *Sources of the Catholic Dogma*, 1115). However, the Confessor can in some cases allow the

penitent to fulfill part of the penance by another person, like giving alms to the poor or to fulfill it himself (the Confessor).

A grave penance should be fulfilled in the soonest possible time, in order not to forget it, and should be fulfilled according to the Confessor's instructions. If the Confessor determines when or how it should be done, it should be followed. Besides the sacramental penance is not to be fulfilled by performing an act already imposed by the law. Hence, if the penance is to hear one Mass, it cannot be fulfilled by hearing the Sunday Mass which is already binding the penitent, or if the penance is to fast, it cannot be fulfilled by fasting on Ash Wednesday or Holy Friday.

3. In order that the fulfillment of penance be really *fruitful* and *meritorious*, it should be done in the state of grace; this condition, however, is not required to *satisfy* the obligation to fulfill the sacramental penance. The reason for the former is obvious; without sanctifying grace no human act has a meritorious value, since grace is the source of spiritual merit. Those in mortal sin cannot gain any merit by doing good works. However, the *obligation to fulfill* the sacramental penance is satisfied even if the penitent is in the state of mortal sin when the penance is fulfilled.

4. In certain circumstances the obligation to fulfill the Sacramental penance can cease to exist, when its fulfillment is physically or morally impossible. In such circumstances it is recommended to request the Confessor to commute it for another easier penance. It happens also when the penitent has already forgotten what penance was imposed upon him, in which case it is advisable to request the Confessor for a new penance, or to voluntarily impose upon himself some mortification in order to substitute the forgotten one.

Coming to the case proposed to us by the Professor of Religion, we have to say that the resolution made by his companion is entirely wrong. One thing is the sacramental penance imposed on him by the Confessor and another thing is the prayers or good works that he may recite or perform daily. The sacramental penance binds him by reason of the sacrament he has received. Whatever he prays or does daily does not bind him under sin. It is performed on his own will or devotion. To omit the former does constitute a sin, mortal or venial as the case may be, while the omission of the latter is not a sin.



Besides, he cannot commute the sacramental penance by himself. It belongs to the Confessor, to whom he has to request the commutation. If he has accepted the penance imposed by the Confessor, he is bound to fulfill it. To disregard it, the non-fulfillment is a sin. Moreover, the serious thing is that he has made a resolution not to fulfill it in the future, which is tantamount to non-acceptance of the sacramental penance which in the future will be imposed upon him, or if he accepts it, he is not sincere in doing so. This means that his confessions will not be good confessions, since a true acceptance of penance belong to the essence of a good confession. We hope he will change his mind and will accept with humility the penance imposed upon him by the Confessor.

Lastly, the good works or prayer imposed by the Confessor as a penance have a meritorious and satisfying effect *ex opere operato*, flowing from the sacrament itself, while those prayers or good works performed on the penitent's own initiative have a spiritual merit depending on his own personal disposition while they are performed.

## **Festal Homilies for September and October 1994**

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*Regino Cortes, O.P.*

### **TWENTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME September 4, 1994**

*First Reading: ISAIAH 35:4-7*

Chapters 34 to 35 of Isaiah, in which our liturgical text is a part, form a literary unit the language of which is related to the apocalyptic literature, that is why some commentators call this passage the "little apocalypse." But it seems the literary form is more akin to prophetic oracles, in this case an oracle against the Edomites who took sides with the Babylonians and invaded southern Judah during the time of Nebuchadnezzar (sixth century B.C.). This was also the theme of the prophet Obadiah. Chapter 35 speaks of the return of the exiles, a topic more in harmony with Deutero-Isaiah (*Is* 40 - 55) so that these passages are now commonly held to have been written after the exile.

Although chapter 35 is in contrast with chapter 34, it is considered a continuation of the former. The restoration of Zion, a portrayal of the messianic era, is described in poetic language. This is the reason for the hyperbolic figure of speech. The healing of the sick was one of the gospel proofs that Jesus fulfilled these Isaian prophecies.

*Second Reading: JAMES 2:1-5*

The second reading continues the letter of St. James which was already started last Sunday (Twenty Second Sunday, Cycle B of the

Liturgical Year). It is in this passage where we have a clear doctrine of the Church's "preferential option for the poor."

Literally verse 1 may be translated: "do not have your faith in our Lord Jesus Christ of glory be mixed with favoritism." The phrase "of glory" is understood by our liturgical text as an adjective, hence translated as "glorified." But it can also be taken as an apposition to "Lord Jesus Christ." Christ is "the Glory" of God.

The Greek word which the liturgical reading translates as "assembly" is *synagoge* and not *ekklesia*. This led some commentators to think that when this letter was written the Christians, especially in Jerusalem, were still having their gatherings in the Jewish synagogue. However the word *synagoge* to designate the Christian assembly and not necessarily the place of gathering was also being used even in the second century as proven in the passages of St. Ignatius of Antioch (+107), *Ad Polycarpum*, 4,2; and in the *Constitutiones Apostolicae* (3,6).

The phrase "have you not discriminated in your hearts," is rendered by the *Jerusalem Bible* as, "Can't you see that you have used two different standards in your mind...?" This is taking the verb *diekrithete* in the active mood as a deponent aorist. But if it is understood in the reflexive designated by the middle voice as in James 1:6 then it may be translated as, "Are you not being inconsistent with yourself?"

### *Gospel Reading: MARK 7:31-37*

The preceding pericope, Mark 7:24-30, which narrates the healing of the daughter of a Syrophoenician woman, is not read during the Cycle B (gospels of St. Mark) of the Ordinary Sundays of the Year. The parallel story from St. Matthew (Cycle A) is read during the Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Our gospel reading this Sunday is a continuation of that story in St. Mark. St. Matthew and St. Luke omits this Marcan episode of the curing of a deaf man. Instead St. Matthew has a general healing story (15:29-31) before the second miracle of the multiplication of the loaves (*Mk* 8:1-10; *Mt* 15:32-39; omitted by St. Luke).

The route followed by Jesus on his return to Galilee is problematic. He went north "by way of Sidon" (about 30 kilometers north of

Tyre) in order to go south. That is why St. Matthew just plainly says: "Jesus went on from there and reached the shores of the Sea of Galilee" (15:29) without mentioning Sidon. Some manuscripts like the Chester Beatty papyrus (p. 45) in Dublin, Ireland of the third century and the Alexandrian Codex in London of the fifth century omit "by way of" and say: "Jesus left the territory of Tyre *and* Sidon (*Tyriou kai Sidonos*) to the Sea of Galilee..." But this is considered as an early correction taking the reading of the Vatican and Sinaitic Codices (*Tyriou elthen dia Sidonos*) as the original one. According to B. M. Metzger (*A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [London/NY, 1971] pp. 95-96) "Jesus took a circuitous route, passing north from Tyre through Sidon and thence southeast across the Leontes, continuing south past Caesarea Philippi to the east of the Jordan and thus approached the lake of Galilee on its east side, within the territory of the Decapolis." These are largely pagan territories. There may be a theological intent here on the part of Mark. As Jesus healed a pagan girl in the north he now cures a deaf man in the eastern pagan territory going around dominantly gentile lands.

The man was not only deaf but had speech impediment as well (*mogilalos*). He was not born deaf because after the cure of his deafness he was able to speak plainly. The Aramaic word of Jesus as in Mark 5:41 is here preserved: *ephphatha* ("be opened"). The Greek word *eutheos* translated by the liturgical reading as "at once" or "immediately" is absent in the Vatican, Sinaitic, Bezae and other codices. It is present in the Chester Beatty papyrus mentioned above and in the Alexandrian Codex. The *Jerusalem Bible* omits it.

There is a change of audience in verse 36, now addressed to the crowd: "he enjoined *them* strictly not to tell anyone." This has been considered as the messianic secret, to impress the crowd that Jesus was not just a wonder-worker but whose identity would be fully revealed after his resurrection. Little by little Isaiah's prophecy which is mentioned in the first reading would be fulfilled: "Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf be cleared" (*Is* 35:5).

### *Homily*

The cure of the deaf man of Decapolis by our Lord, a pagan territory, is a foretaste of the missionary activity of the Church, the

Mystical Body of Christ, to pagan territories throughout the world starting from Asia Minor by the preaching of St. Paul, the eminent preacher to the Gentiles, until the remotest recesses of Asia and Africa by our modern missionaries. Faith has been usually linked with hearing so that a deaf man may be likened to somebody devoid of faith. Billions of people are still spiritually deaf.

In the case of this deaf man our Lord did something unusual: "He put his fingers into the man's ears and spitting, touched his tongue." The man was able to hear and plainly spoke. He proclaimed the mighty deeds of the Lord. The tongue which, according to St. James (3:6), "is a whole wicked world in itself," became the harbinger of salvation having been touched by the divine.

The tongue is two-sided. St. James adds: "We use it to bless the Lord and Father, but we also use it to curse men who are made in God's image" (3:9). The tongue which touches the Lord in Holy Communion must refrain from making that tongue the instrument of evil. The ideal is what St. Dominic had practiced during his life time. He only spoke with God or about God.

## **TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**September 11, 1994**

*First Reading: ISAIAH 50:5-9*

This passage is actually the third song of the "Servant of Yahweh" starting with verse 4 which is omitted in our liturgical reading. The verse is differently translated because of textual variants. The JB reads: "The Lord Yahweh has given me a disciple's tongue. So that I may know how *to reply* to the wearied he provides me with speech. Each morning he wakes me to hear, to listen like a disciple." The New Jerome Biblical Commentary proposes: "The Lord Yahweh has given me a disciple's tongue, that I may know how *to sustain* the weary. The word rouses me in the morning, in the morning he rouses my ear to hear like a disciple." The words in italics is the result of variously reading the term *la'uth* (Hebrew: "to sustain" which is the reading of the NJBC). But there is another variant *la'anoth* ("to reply") found in the Septuagint which is followed

by the JB. The Targum (Aramaic Bible) has *lir'oth*, "to feed." The punctuation is not also clear which accounts for the differences in the translations above. In the Hebrew text the period is placed after *callimmudim* which literally means "like *the* disciples." Verse 9b: "They shall all go to pieces like a garment devoured by moths" (JB) is also omitted by our liturgical text. This sentence seems to be a fragment of verse 3 which is not part of the Song.

The "opening" of the servant's ear by God denotes a revelation which he accepts with docility and preaches it to others "in season and out of season," as St. Paul says. Just like the prophets of old he suffered persecution. But he unflinchingly bore this all for the sake of the message well aware that the Lord God is his help. "I gave my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who plucked my beard" (v. 6). The "Servant of Yahweh" has been identified with Jesus Christ.

### *Second Reading: JAMES 2:14-18*

This passage is devastating against those who hold, like Luther and his followers, that faith without good works is sufficient for salvation, misinterpreting phrases in St. Paul as in Romans 3:28: "a man is justified by faith and not by doing something the Law tells him to do" (JB). The King James Version reads: "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the Law." However, the Good News Bible which is quite surprising has: "For we conclude that a person is put right with God *only* through faith, and not by doing what the Law commands" (Italic ours). The exclusivistic interpretation of this verse cannot be accepted. It was Luther who inserted the word *allein* ("only") in his German translation of this passage. All the Greek manuscripts do not have this word. Furthermore the verse does not speak of all "good works," but "works of the Law," or the practice of the Mosaic Law. Faith without good works is lifeless or dead (cf. *Ga* 5:6; *Ro* 2:6; 8:2 ff.).

Verse 18 is variously interpreted. The principal difference is in the understanding of *alla* in the phrase *all'erei tis* (literally: "But someone will say" as in the Good News Bible). This is taking *alla* in the adversative sense presupposing a third person objector expectedly against those who emphasize good works. But the next sentence is directed against those who emphasize faith. *Alla*, therefore, is not taken here as adversative but emphatic or confirmative as in *2 Co* 7:11

where it is used 6 times with an emphatic meaning. This seems to be the sense in the King James Version: "Yea, a man may say,..." This is also the sense behind the translation of our liturgical text: "To such a person one might say." The "person" here is the one mentioned in verse 15 who merely says well-wishes to his or her brothers and sisters without meeting their bodily needs.

*Gospel Reading: MARK 8:27-35*

A new section starts in this Markan passage which is more characterized now by Christ's teaching of his immediate disciples. As the first section ended with the cure of a blind at Bethsaida, this section will end with the cure of the blind man, Bartimaeus, at Jericho (Mk 10:46-52), to be followed by the section of Christ's arrival in Jerusalem and the passion narrative.

Little by little Jesus will be manifesting his true messianic character to his apostles starting with the confession of St. Peter at Caesarea, Philippi. This part is also characterized by Christ's three-fold prediction of his passion: 8:31-33; 9:30-32; 10:32-4. It is likewise remarkable that the three synoptic evangelists follow the same sequence of events starting with St. Peter's profession of faith in the messiahship of Jesus to the second prediction of the passion: first prediction of the passion, condition of following Christ, transfiguration, curing of epileptic demoniac, second prediction of the passion.

There are however variants in the exact phrase of St. Peter. St. Mark is succinct: "You are the Christ" (*Sy ei ho Christos*). Our liturgical text employs the Aramaic word "Messiah," which, of course, is translated in Greek as "*Christos*," or "Anointed." St. Matthew has a longer form: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God," while St. Luke is in the middle: "The Christ of God."

St. Luke also omits, contrary to St. Matthew and St. Mark, the rebuke of Christ to Peter, calling him, who just confessed his messiahship, *satan*. This term however does not connote here the "prince of devils," as in *1 Chr* 21:1 which in this passage has no article and is taken as a proper noun. The sense is more like the one in *Jb* 1:6; 2:1 which has an article: "the *satan*," and may mean an objector, a protester. This word seems to have originated in ancient Jewish court proceedings where a person acts as the accuser or prosecutor.

It is also a characteristic of St. Mark that after every prediction of his passion our Lord follows it up with lessons on humility and suffering (8:34-38; 9:33-37; 10:39-40). Our gospel reading concludes: "If a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self, take up his cross (St. Luke adds "daily," 9:23) and follow in my steps."

### *Homily*

If Christ were to ask today the same question that he asked his apostles: "Who do people say that I am?" we will receive not only three or so answers but a dozen or more. Some say he was a wonderful man, but nevertheless only a man; he was a prophet yet less a prophet than Mohammed who for millions of Muslims in the world is the greatest of the prophets; he was for some protestant theologians God's greatest saving act by his death on the cross but his resurrection only originated in the consciousness of the first Christians; for the rock-and-rollers he is Jesus Christ-Superstar; for others he was a great "guru" Hindu-type. Still for more than a billion Christians, led by the Pope and echoing St. Peter's confession, he is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

Christ's mystical body, the Church, continues his salvific work. But the Church must follow faithfully Christ's way in saving the world. It is not through the exercise of political power but through the power of the cross. It is not by triumphalistic means but by the way of humility and suffering. It is not by way of the Palatine imperial throne but by way of calvary or the Vatican hill of execution. Christendom or the reign of the Church like temporal rulers of this world must give way to real Christianity or the spiritual reign of Christ in truth, justice and charity.

Salvation for individual Christians can only be achieved likewise by taking up the cross and following the footsteps of Christ. We are wont to criticize the government for its failure to deliver needed goods and services but we do not lift a hand to help in this regard. Lack of discipline results in giant traffic snarls; improper garbage disposals block esteros causing floods and seemingly the red tide menace when garbage goes into the sea; illegal logging have resulted in inundations which claimed thousands of lives. All this because of our tendency to follow the line of least resistance. The cross may be costing us our lifestyle of convenience but it is the only way to a life of perpetual peace.



**TWENTY-FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**September 18, 1994**

*First Reading: WISDOM 2:17-20*

The liturgical reading is the final portion of the discourse of the wicked which starts from 1:16 in the book of Wisdom. The "wicked" here, severely censured by the book, were the renegade Jews of Alexandria who were influenced by the Epicurean and hedonistic way of life. They say: "Come then, let us enjoy what good things there are, use this creation with the zest of youth; take our fill of the dearest wines and perfumes, let not one flower of springtime pass us by, before they wither crown ourselves with roses" (Ws 2:6-7).

Since the virtuous are a threat to their way of life the wicked propose to persecute him, even lead him towards a shameful death (v. 20). They say: "With revilement and torture let us put him to the test that we may have proof of his gentleness and try his patience" (v. 19).

Verse 17 is longer in the Vulgate adding the phrase: "Let us observe what happens to him," which is not in the Greek Septuagint. The original language actually of the Book of Wisdom is Greek and hence it is absent in the Hebrew Bible. But it is part of the Septuagint following the so-called Alexandrian canon of Scriptures which apostolic tradition has handed down to the Church as having the complete canon of the Old Testament.

*Second Reading: JAMES 3:16 - 4:3*

Our liturgical text has joined two sections from the Letter of James: the last part of the section contrasting divine wisdom or "wisdom from above" and "earthly, animal and devilish" wisdom (v. 15) on the one hand, and on the other the beginning of the section of "disunity among Christians" analyzing the causes of this disunity. Wisdom from above is presented with seven characteristics: *innocent, peaceable, lenient, docile, rich in sympathy with fruits of kindly deeds, impartial and sincere*. The Vulgate has eight adding after "docile" the phrase "consenting to good." This wisdom therefore which comes from above is more practical than theoretical which leads to the practice of Christian virtues.

The second part analyzes the motives of conflicts or discord in the community. Since one of the results of wisdom coming from above is peace, discord can only come from "earthly, animal, or devilish" wisdom. It originates, according to James, from the "inner cravings" (*hedone* - "desires" [JB] or "concupiscence") "making war within (Greek: *en*) your members." This seems to be a recognition on the part of the epistle of the conflict within man himself because of disordinate passions. The preposition *en* however can also be understood as a preposition of instrumentality meaning "by means of." The sense of the phrase may then be related to *Rm* 6:13 in which the members of the body may be used as a weapon on the side of sin or on the side of God. "That is why you must not let sin reign in your mortal bodies or command your obedience to bodily passions, why you must not let any part of your body turn into an unholy weapon fighting on the side of sin; ...you should make every part of your body into a weapon fighting on the side of God" (*Rm* 6:12-13).

### *Gospel Reading: MARK 9:30-37*

As we find it now in our liturgical reading our gospel pericope has two sections: the second prediction of the passion and another lesson on humility. The literary unity however is not very clear. St. Matthew does not follow up the second prediction of the passion with the lesson on humility. St. Luke is in harmony with St. Mark with some significant differences.

The geographical setting in St. Mark seems easy to follow. The transfiguration had just happened and they had just gone down from the mountain. But the indication of our liturgical reading that "Jesus and his disciples came down from the mountain" to introduce this passage has its link in verse 9 jumping two other episodes from that verse: The question about Elijah and the cure of the epileptic demoniac. Verse 30 starts rather with *kakeithen* = *kai ekeithen* which simply means "and from that place." St. Mark gives the impression that after the transfiguration Jesus had now his eyes on Jerusalem and was just traversing Galilee passing through Capernaum. The third prediction of the passion in 10:33 happened in fact while they were on their way to Jerusalem.

"The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men..." does not here connote the betrayal of Judas. The passive form among

the Jews is usually employed as a circumlocution for God. Jesus is practically saying that his deliverance into the hands of his executors would be the plan of God and would be just following this plan.

The episode "on humility" was not linked by St. Matthew to the second prediction of the passion (17:22-23) and his saying of welcoming a child is placed in another context, that of leading others astray (*Mt* 18:5 ff.). In Matthew, Christ's answer to the question: "Who is the greatest?" was the similar act of putting a child in the midst of the Apostles but with another saying: "I tell you solemnly, unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." This passage was placed by St. Mark (10:13-19) followed by St. Luke (18:15-17) in the episode of "Jesus and the children." Understandably St. Matthew omits this saying in his parallel text (*Mt* 19:13-15). Maybe these three episodes: "second prediction of the passion," discussion on "who is the greatest" and "welcoming a child" were formerly independent units that is why it is found contextually different among the synoptics.

### *Homily*

Election time is only a few months away and understandably politicians and candidates are making hectic preparations and plotting strategies to win the citizens' votes. There are strategies which are honest, even seemingly innocuous ones like making promises and pledges to bring heaven to earth, never mind if they are not fulfilled. There will always be suckers who would be convinced. But there are campaign ploys which are dishonest, as destroying the reputation of the opponent. Such means are evil and must be condemned.

But how many of these our candidates heed the injunction of the Lord to reject the ambition of being first but rather to remain "the last one of all and the servant of all"? In the perception of our worldly candidates this saying is total madness. How can anyone be a leader if he considers himself the last? How can one be a ruler if he becomes a servant? Yet what the Lord said was unequivocal and clear.

There is a passage in the Book of Judges which may further explain this gospel teaching. This is the fable pronounced by Jotham after his brother Abimelech proclaimed himself king at Shechem after murdering his seventy other brothers. Jotham was the only one

who escaped (*Jg* 9:7-15). The trees gathered one day to look for a king. They approached the olive, then the fig tree, then the grape vine which all refused since they would not forego their produce (meaning their service to others) "to sway above the trees." So a useless thornbush (referring to Abimelech) became king who threatened that fire would come down from it and destroy the cedars of Lebanon. Abimelech was later killed while besieging Thebez and climbing the tower where the inhabitants took refuge at the roof. Abimelech wanted to set it on fire (just like in the fable) but a woman threw down a millstone and crushed his head (9:22). He who wanted to become first died an ignominious death.

## **TWENTY-SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**September 25, 1994**

*First Reading: NUMBERS 11:25-29*

The geographical context of our pericope according to the biblical story is the journey of Moses group from Sinai to Kadesh. Here different episodes are narrated including three stories of rebellion in different places: Taberah (11:1-3) which is an aetiological story of how the place got its name which the sacred author interpreted as "to burn" "because the fire of Yahweh had burned among them." whereas the original meaning seems to be "grazing land"; Kibroth-hattaavah (11:4-34), another aetiology of the place which could mean "the graves of greed," "because it was there that they buried the people who had indulged their greed"; Hazeroth (12:1-16) which narrates the rebellion of Miriam and Aaron.

Our liturgical text is part of the second story connected also with the story of the quails which is a doublet of Exodus 16:12-13. While in Exodus (also in *Ps* 105:40) the sending of the quails denotes Yahweh's providential care for his people, here in Numbers it is presented as punishment for their rebellion.

The investiture of seventy elders with the prophetic spirit is contextually part of this Kibroth-hattaavah episode. Having promised by Yahweh to Moses in 11:16, the elders were gathered in the Tent of Meeting (which was outside the camp contrary to priestly tradition) and there they were bestowed the spirit (of prophecy) taken

by God from Moses himself. The sharing of supernatural gifts may be discerned here.

A textual difficulty appears in verse 25 since the Hebrew text ends with *lo'yasafu* (lit. "and they did not do again," hence the JB: "but not again," with the footnote: *The gift was only for a time*). The Latin Vulgate however has "nor did they cease afterwards." Our liturgical text simply omits it.

The addition of two other elders who also received the spirit of prophecy, Eldad and Medad, although separated from the group in the Tent of Meeting, makes their number 72. This number will have parallels in later traditions as in the 72 disciples sent by Christ in Luke 10:1-12 and the 72 Jewish translators (6 from each tribe) of the Hebrew Torah into Greek (thus known as the *Septuagint*) during the time of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285-246 B.C.) mentioned in the *Letter of Aristeas*.

### *Second Reading: JAMES 5:1-6*

This is the last text from the letter of James read in our Sunday Eucharistic celebrations. It is a warning for the rich imitating the oracular style of the prophets.

It is time for the rich to weep and wail because of their coming miseries. The use of the perfect tense has made the image of misery more actual. Their wealth has corrupted (*sesepe*), their garments moth-eaten (*setobrota gegonen*), their gold and silver have rusted (*katiotai*). Although gold and silver actually do not rust we may understand the author's intent here that even these metals are not utterly indestructible.

Severe judgment are pronounced against the rich who are oppressors of the poor. They are guilty of three grave injustices: 1) withholding wages of their farmhands. This is one of the sins that cry vengeance to heaven; 2) living in wanton luxury oblivious of the cry of the poor. But ironically the rich are living a life like fattened calf prepared for slaughter; 3) condemned, even killed, the just man. The just man in this passage (*ho dikaios*) seems not to refer to Christ, as some interpreters think, but the poor just man in general as in Isaiah 57:1; Psalm 94:21; Wisdom 2:10.

*Gospel Reading:* MARK 9:38-43, 45, 47-48.

Three pericopes are here grouped together after the lesson on humility in last Sunday's gospel: "On using the name of Jesus" (vv. 38-40), "charity shown to Christ's disciples" (v. 41), "on scandal" (vv. 42-48). Some key words justify the link among these different sayings of Jesus although they might have been previously disunited: "in my name," "little ones," "scandal."

The pericope "on using the name of Jesus" has a parallel in Numbers 11:26-29 (first reading) in the case of Eldad and Medad who also received the spirit of prophecy even outside the tent of meeting. Yet we read in St. Matthew 7:21-22 that not all those who say "Lord, Lord," who have even prophesied, cast out demons and work miracles in the name of Jesus will enter the kingdom of heaven but the person who does the will of the Father in heaven.

The passage on scandal is much shorter in St. Luke who omits the cutting off of members causing scandal. Some find this doctrine so severe that they interpret it in an allegorical manner taking the different bodily members which are important to man: the eyes, hands and feet, to mean persons close and beloved to someone being the object of scandal. One should not hesitate separating from these persons in spite of their closeness and importance. Another interpretation given by the New Jerome Biblical Commentary takes the parts of the body as members of the Christian community giving offense to other members. "That these sayings had a communal dimension and served to exclude members of the Church who gave offense is plausible in view of ancient Greco-Roman uses of the body as a communal metaphor." In fact these principal parts of the body which a Christian should not hesitate to cut off if they cause our damnation are just examples of a general spiritual law that all those which corrupt a man and causes sin should be radically suppressed.

### *Homily*

Miracle crusades now abound in our country. Preachers claim to perform "miracles" invoking the name of Jesus. Mostly these acts which cause wonder among the audience are cures, some even instant cures of serious diseases which doctors have already given up. One thing however is remarkable. These wonderful healings are verified

not only in Catholic charismatic gatherings but in other religious groups even in non-Christian groups like the Dervishes of Islam, among Hindus, among Buddhists. Are these cures miraculous?

I once interviewed a noted "faith healer" priest in the United States who founded healing ministries in various hospitals and asked how many among those he healed does he consider miraculous cures. His answer was surprising. He said only 5% *could* be miraculous while the other 95% are psychological cures. He was not even categorical that the five percent were truly miraculous healings. This is theologically correct since no one can affirm for sure whether a supernatural effect really happened, which is our definition of a miracle, unless it comes from a supernatural entity. This is the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ animated by the Holy Spirit which has the prerogative of judging a certain event miraculous or not. In Lourdes, France, where our Blessed Mother appeared to St. Bernadette Soubirous in 1858 thousands of cures have been recorded yet only about 60 or so have been pronounced miraculous.

But our Lord is emphatic in Matthew 7:21 ff. that not all those who say "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, not even those who prophesy, cast out demons, work miracles in his name, "but the person who does the will of the Father in heaven." This is also what St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13 that extraordinary effects are not enough like gift of prophecy, understanding the mysteries, faith to move mountains, eloquence of men or angels, if love is wanting. If there is love and obedience to the will of the Father then we cannot be the cause of scandal to anyone. Then we "must not let any part of our body turn into an unholy weapon fighting on the side of sin..." but should rather "make every part of our body into a weapon fighting on the side of God" (Ro 16:3).

## TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

October 2, 1994

*First Reading:* GENESIS 2:18-24

It may be observed that the choice of the first readings in our Sunday Eucharistic celebrations is influenced in a way by the gospel

reading. Since the gospel cites this text of Genesis the choice of this passage for the first reading in this Sunday's Mass is very appropriate.

The second narration of creation (*Gn* 2:4b-25) has nuances and special messages which are not expressed in the first narration (*Gn* 1:1 - 2:4a). The first narration only says that "male and female he created them" (1:27). In the second narration the creation of woman was preceded by the creation of animals intended to be helpmates for man but inadequate. The naming of the animals in verse 20 signifies man's mastery over them.

The special way by which woman was created in chapter 2:21 ff. is a literary coup on the part of the sacred writer. Woman was not created from the soil but from an intimate part of man. This signifies, as explained in the following verses (23-24), the mutual attraction of the sexes for the propagation of the species and the indissolubility of marriage curbing at the same time sexual abuses. Verse 24 is cited in St. Matthew 19:5 and St. Mark 10:7 against divorce and in Ephesians 5:31 as the symbol of Christ's union with the Church.

### *Second Reading: HEBREWS 2:9-11*

Starting this Sunday until the 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time the second reading during the Cycle B of the Ordinary Sundays of the Year will be taken from the Epistle to the Hebrews. It seems now to be an established conclusion of biblical scholarship that this letter did not come even indirectly from St. Paul. Some have dissociated it already from the body of Paulinian letters and include it in the last grouping of epistles. The author is unknown although definitely a Jewish convert to Christianity and most probably writing to Jewish Christians some of whom are in danger of falling away. There are strong tendencies to regard Apollos as the author.

The first part of Hebrews is dedicated by the author in proving that Christ, the Son of God, is higher than the angels who in the Old Testament were considered intermediaries of the Law. Yet "for a little while (*brachy ti*) Jesus was made lower than the angels..." (v. 7 and 9, citing *Ps* 8:4ff.). *Brachy ti* can also be understood as "less in degree" but here the temporal meaning is very much appropriate. The reason why temporarily Christ was made lower than the angels is in order



that he might taste death "through God's gracious will" (*chariti theou*). However some read here *choris theou*, "without God" which is then associated with Mark 15:34 = Matthew 47:46.

Our liturgical text opted to link "bringing many sons to glory" to God. But the participle *agagonta* ("bringing") may also refer to Christ. The translation then would be: "...it was fitting that God...should make their leader in the work of salvation perfect through suffering, the one who brings many sons to glory." This is however the minority opinion.

In verse 11 the Greek phrase *ex henos* is translated by the liturgical text as "one and the same Father" (JB has: "of the same stock"). There are diverse opinions as to the identity of this "father" or "stock": God, Abraham or Adam. The best opinion, I believe, is Adam. Since Christ is of Adam's stock "he is not ashamed to call everyone as brothers."

### *Gospel Reading: MARK 10:2-16*

Our liturgical reading has again joined two pericopes which also follow each other in St. Mark: "the question of divorce" (vv. 2-12) and "Jesus with the children" (vv. 13-16). The first pericope with some variants is likewise found in St. Matthew (19:1-9; complimented by 5:31-32) but this is prominently absent in St. Luke.

The Jewish context of the dispute about divorce is much clearer in St. Matthew than in St. Mark. This is an indication that St. Mark was writing for non-Jewish readers. The Matthaean ending (not in St. Mark) of the Pharisees' question states: "on any pretext whatever?" They want Jesus to pronounce a verdict either pro-Shammai or pro-Hillel. These were the two Jewish Rabbis whose interpretations of Deuteronomy 24:1 had been debated among the Pharisees. The bone of contention was the phrase *`erwat davar* translated by JB as "impropriety." The more tolerant school of Hillel teaches that any impropriety, for example, spoiling a dish, would be ground for divorce, while the stricter school of Shammai interprets this as only referring to *zenuth* (translated in Greek as *porneia* as in Ac 15:20). Some take this to refer to those incestuous unions forbidden in Leviticus 18:6-18. But, as the footnote of the Jerusalem Bible to Matthew 19:9 observes: "the severance of such a union is so obvious

an obligation as not to deserve mention. The explanation seems rather to be that this text of Matthew creates a special category for cases of infidelity in marriage since these require their own solution -- but nowhere does he suggest what the solution is. This solution, which was not required at the time when full divorce was allowed, was destined to take shape in the Church and emerge as a 'separation' of the parties that carried with it no permission to remarry."

St. Mark was not interested at all about these Rabbinic disputes and clearly gives Jesus' stand on the indissolubility of marriage. It is in fact his addition that not only the man but also "the woman who divorces her husband and marries another commits adultery" (v. 12).

The second pericope, about "Jesus and the children," may or may not be read. That is why it is enclosed in brackets in our liturgical text. But it is a significant follow-up to the issue on divorce. Oftentimes the children are the ones who suffer because of the break up of parents.

### *Homily*

Right will always be right even if nobody is right. Wrong will always be wrong even if everybody is wrong. Objective truth and falsity are not items for a democratic vote. The majority cannot change what is true and make it into a lie. Gold will not turn into dust just because ninety-nine percent of the population say so. So are all things of nature. They will always remain as such even though men's perception of them varies like the lunar face. A jury may acquit a man wrongly that he did not commit a murder even if objectively he did so. That would not make him innocent in the eyes of God.

If marriage is indissoluble by nature then no amount of state legislation can make it soluble. It would be like passing a law declaring the cholera virus fit for consumption. What the state should do in this case is to enact laws to make divorce an impossibility, help the couples to stay faithful, create an environment for a healthy and united family life. After all the family is the backbone of society, the cellular unit of the state. If the family cells are weak then we can surely expect a weak society, a weak state, a weak nation.

Let the state not encourage divorce. Let our efforts be for fostering a strong family life. We are aware of the difficulties

involved. But we have been warned about this already in the gospel. There is still the hardness of men's heart to reckon with. But just like the unrelenting war of doctors against cigarette smoking because it causes lung cancer, with the clear sign in every cigarette pack that "smoking is dangerous to one's health," although unheeded by millions of smokers, let us also be relentless in campaigning for the unity of marriage. In spite of many divorce seekers we too can shout from the rooftops that "divorce is dangerous to a nation's health."

## **TWENTY-EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**October 9, 1994**

*First Reading: WISDOM 7:7-11*

A chiasmic structure or *inclusio* may be discerned from the repetition of the phrase "came to me" in the beginning and end of this passage. By fiction from the sacred writer King Solomon, the eminent patron of Wisdom, prayed for the spirit of Wisdom to be given him. If King Solomon prayed for Wisdom how much more others of lesser stature. This prayer for Wisdom is given in chapter 9.

Wisdom is the greatest treasure of all, to be preferred more than power ("scepter and throne"), riches or priceless gems. Compared with her (wisdom is feminine in Hebrew) gold is like sand, silver like mud. She is more valuable than health or comeliness. She is even more than light. But what is remarkable is that in having Wisdom one also takes possession of all of the above. As Jesus later would proclaim in the sermon on the mount: "Set your hearts on God's kingdom first, and on his righteousness, and all these other things will be given you as well" (*Mt* 6:33).

*Second Reading: HEBREWS 4:12-13*

This short passage presents the power of the Word of God, "living and effective." Although there is definitely a personification here of the Word, there is no sure warranty that it is also referred to the Word-Incarnate.

"Sharper than any two-edged sword" which connotes the penetrating power of the Word is couched in the language of Philo of

Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher. This is the reason for tracing the origin of this letter in that area although still uncertain.

The mention of "soul and spirit, joints and marrow" should not lead us to do a dissection of the psychological ideas of the author but only to understand his intent of portraying the Word which by its power to penetrate even the inner recesses of the soul, "judges the reflections and thoughts of the heart." Someday we are to render an account to the author of this Word.

*Gospel Reading: MARK 10:17-30*

Three passages may be distinguished in the gospel reading: "the rich young man" (17-22), "the danger of riches" (23-27), and the "reward of renunciation" (28-30). The last text, which is enclosed in brackets in the liturgical reading, is optional. They are all linked by the keyword "riches."

The description "young" (*neaniskos*) is only found in St. Matthew about which St. Mark and St. Luke are silent. St. Luke however calls him an *archon* (18:18, literally "ruler," or perhaps an "aristocrat").

The answer of Jesus in St. Mark to the address of the rich man calling him "Good Teacher," is surprising. He says: "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone." The dialogue in St. Matthew seems an attempt to soften this dilemma. "Jesus said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is one alone who is good (the Vulgate adds: God)'." If the version of St. Mark is considered to be the more original there must be an in-depth dimension in the answer that is also a question. If the inquirer called him good considering him as merely a human being and if no one is good (absolutely speaking) but God alone, then the man must consider him God. This could have made the man reflect profoundly as the readers of St. Mark must have.

Many spiritual writers have taken this episode as the basis for the evangelical counsel of poverty. Yet, although this vow is definitely an element of Christian perfection, to base it alone on this episode is insufficient. Christ was in fact more radical here reversing the usual Old Testament concept that wealth is a blessing by emphasizing its dangers for entering the kingdom of God. "It is easier for a camel to

pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." Some have tried to read *kamilon* (rope) instead of *kamelon* (camel) but the latter seems to be the original reading. The hyperbole accentuates the humanly impossible but "with God all things are possible."

### *Homily*

The rich young man went away with a conflict in his heart. He went away sad because he had many possessions. On the one hand he desired to enter the kingdom of God and experience the spiritual joy and peace which the Lord promised for those who enter into it, but on the other hand, he was attached to his earthly possessions. The gospel does not tell us anything anymore about the fate of this rich young man but the Lord has continued in giving us the lesson of how wealth can be an obstacle to our real happiness with a hyperbolic declaration that "it is easier for a camel to pass through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

This is a declaration that greatly modified if not totally reversed the Old Testament idea on wealth. Was not Abraham wealthy? Was Job not rewarded by restoring to him his previous possessions and more besides? Was David not a rich king? Yet these virtuous rich can be counted by the fingers. The wicked rich are a-plenty and the worse thing is that their wickedness is directly related to their wealth in the sense that they use their wealth to perform evil deeds.

Because of love for profit the poor are oppressed. This is clearly denounced by the prophet Amos during the time of Jeroboam II when the prosperity of Israel is only equalled by the injustices committed to the poor. "For the three crimes, the four crimes of Israel I have made my decree and will not relent: because they have sold the virtuous man for silver and the poor man for a pair of sandals, because they trample on the heads of ordinary people and push the poor out of their path..." (*Am* 2:6).

Wealth is a means and not an end. St. Paul does not say that *money* is the "root of all evils," but the *love of money* (*1 Tm* 6:10). If wealth is used as a means to a good end, to uplift the quality of life, to alleviate the poor, then it is a boon. If it is employed to exploit one's neighbors and persecute the poor, then it is a bane.

**TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**  
**October 16, 1994**

*First Reading: ISAIAH 53:10-11*

Our liturgical text is the last part of the Fourth Song of the Servant of Yahweh (52:13 - 53:12) which has a messianic character. Differently from other messianic prophecies this song portrays the Messiah as suffering: "the Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity." But as "offering for sin" he shall be victorious and reap rewards not for himself but for others.

"Through his suffering" in verse 11 is a different phrase in Hebrew which reads "by his knowledge." If this reading is correct the New Jerome Biblical Commentary has this interpretation: "a full experiential union with a suffering, sinful people. He will share his own goodness with them (*justify many*) and thus fulfill all divine promises."

*Second Reading: HEBREWS 4:14-16*

Jesus is the "great high priest" full of mercy and who would always help us in time of need because he became like us and knows our weaknesses. This title "great" (*megas*) attached to "high priest" (*archiereus*) and applied to Jesus is only found in this verse in the whole New Testament. It may be a way of distinguishing Jesus and at the same time expressing his superiority to the chief priests of the Jewish hierarchy.

Since we have a merciful Lord the "throne of grace" should not be anymore for us awesome and unreachable but in fact to be approached with confidence. The "throne of mercy," or the *kapporet* of the Ark of the Covenant seems to have a role here.

*Gospel Reading: MARK 10:35-45*

This passage in St. Mark and in St. Matthew (20:20-23) is preceded by the third prediction of the passion. The text is absent in St. Luke. The version of St. Matthew has some slight differences in that it was the mother of James and John who asked the favor for her two sons and hence the dialogue vary from that of St. Mark. For the

phrase "in your glory" in St. Mark, St. Matthew has "in your kingdom." There is now an eschatological dimension of these phrases but in the context it may just mean a political kingdom of a political messiah.

The thinking of the apostles about the Messiaship of Jesus was not yet changed by the threefold prediction of his passion. They were nearing Jerusalem and they were confident that it would be in Jerusalem that Christ would inaugurate his kingdom. But they did not know what they were asking.

The answer of Jesus refers to his passion. The image of the "cup" (Hebrew: *cos*) is ambiguous in the Old Testament. Sometimes it has the image of joy (*Ps* 23:5; 116:13; *Jr* 16:7)), sometimes the "cup of God's wrath," hence suffering (*Is* 51:17; *Jr* 25:15 ff.). Here it is taken more in parallel with *Mk* 14:36 used by Christ to refer to his passion during his prayer at Gethsemane. The word *baptisma* (translated in the liturgical text as "bath") has the same connotation. The future tense of the liturgical text: "I shall drink" does not express the Greek present tense: *pino* (lit. "I am drinking") which seems to connote that even during his public ministry Christ was already on his passion phase.

James and John would indeed drink the cup of suffering. The first apostle to be martyred was St. James beheaded by order of Herod Agrippa I in 43/44 A.D. St. John was exiled to Patmos about 95 A.D. during the reign of Domitian although he died a natural death contrary to the testimony of Papias of Hierapolis. His being thrown into a cauldron of boiling oil attested by Tertullian seems to be legendary.

The indignation of the other apostles, still so humanly afflicted before the fire of Pentecost consumed all their selfishness, was the occasion for Jesus to teach them anew the virtue of humility, to imitate their Master, the Son of Man "who has not come to be served but to serve."

### *Homily*

For the world, power and ambition are the staples of life. This was the thinking of Pilate who, in the presence of an accused man whose innocence he could not care less, but only to hold on to his position as the "friend" of Caesar, boasted that he had the power to

release or crucify him. He was stunned when this seemingly helpless man said: "You would have no power over me if it had not been given you from above" (*Jn* 19:11).

Since power, authority, sovereignty (cf. *Rm* 13:1) comes from God we cannot boast of it. We have to use it, as all other things coming from God, according to his will. And God's will is that power is for service. In the example of the Lord, he came not to be served but to serve.

In a democratic society, power is supposed to reside on the people. The president and all other elected officials are just representatives of the people. But for the majority of the people, they think they can only exercise this power during election time when they write the names of their candidates on ballots. They are not aware that this power is in them all the time.

If power is God-given and for service, then the democratic powers of every citizen in a democratic society must also be geared for service. To shelve this power until the next election time comes around and not use it especially if the good of society so demands would constitute gross negligence. We should not whine if someday the Giver of this power would take it away from us to be again under a dictatorship worse than the previous one.

## **THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**October 23, 1994**

*First Reading: JEREMIAH 31:7-9*

This is a prophecy of consolation by Jeremiah picturing the return of the exiles. But here the returnees are the "remnant of Israel" and the origin is "from the land of the north," that is Assyria. This could not refer to Babylon since this is situated to the east of Jerusalem. Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C. precisely during the heyday of Jeremiah. Could it be that some of those who were exiled there or their descendants, the likes of Tobias and Sarah, were able to return after the fall of Nineveh? The old Tobit before he died at Nineveh told his son Tobias to go rather to Media (modern Iran) not to be overtaken by the destruction of Nineveh as predicted by the



prophet Nahum (*Tb* 14:4). Then he prophesied the return of the exiles (in the context, the northern exiles).

There is no biblical nor extra-biblical record whatsoever of the return of the exiles of the northern kingdom. The Book of Tobit was a very late book and the reminiscences there about the return of the exiles were those from Babylonian captivity, about two centuries after the fall of Samaria.

The return of the northern exiles which was hoped for by Jeremiah became a reality for the southern kingdom after their exile in Babylon. But when Jeremiah wrote these passages the Babylonian exile had not yet happened. This hope for the return of the Israelites and reunification with Judah was rekindled during the time of Josiah (between 622 and 609 B.C.) when this king was able to extend his domain as far as Galilee.

*Second Reading: HEBREWS 5:1-6*

There is emphasis in this passage on the divine election of every high priest, and hence "even Christ did not glorify himself with the office of high priest." He was constituted so by his Father. The priest is mediator between God and men.

In the Book of Leviticus, chapters 4 and 5, there are various sacrifices for sin (singular): sin of the community; of leaders in the community; of private individuals; some special cases of Sacrifice for Sin (5:1-6); sin of the high priest. Here, however, it speaks of "sacrifices for sins (plural)" which could refer to the rite of the Day of Atonement (*Lv* 16:30).

*Gospel Reading: MARK 10:46-52*

As St. Mark ended a section in his gospel with the narration of the curing of a blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26) so now he ends the section of Christ's journey to Jerusalem, characterized also by the Lord's personal and more intimate teachings to his apostles, with the curing of the blind man of Jericho. St. Mark has even given us the name of this blind man: Bartimaeus or son of Timaeus. The parallel story in St. Matthew speaks of two blind men (20:29-34). St. Luke is closer to St. Mark but does not name the blind man. The Markan narration is likely the more original one.

New Testament Jericho is different from the Old Testament Jericho which is situated in the ruins of Tell-es-Sultan and also from modern Jericho. This is a city with a very long history, actually an oasis in the desert of Judah about thirty kilometers from Jerusalem. The New Testament Jericho lies about two kilometers south of Old Testament Jericho built by Herod the Great and his son Archelaus at the south side of Wadi-el-Kelt on low lying mounds called Tulul Abu el-Alayiq.

The blind man addresses Jesus as "Son of David," a messianic title which is only found in this episode in the Gospel of St. Mark (vv. 47 and 48). The Markan account of Jesus triumphal entry to Jerusalem which immediately follows this pericope (11:1-11) does not mention it although it is given in the parallel text of St. Matthew in the acclamation of the people: "Hosanna to the Son of David" (21:9).

No healing action on the part of Christ is reported by St. Mark. The Lord just said: "Be on your way! Your faith has healed you," and instantly the blind recovered his sight. St. Luke adds, "receive your sight" (18:42), while St. Matthew records that Jesus touched the eyes of the two blind men, and "immediately their sight returned" (20:34). There is no mention of the required faith for healing.

### *Homily*

It is indeed a great handicap to be blind. One would miss the many beauties of nature, the colors of the flowers and the fields, the splendor of the sunset, the varied hues of the rainbow. One would have difficulty in going places, in enjoying many niceties of life. Yet sight is still a very inferior faculty compared to the human intellect which makes us apprehend other realities which the senses cannot perceive. With the use of his intelligence man was able to extend the use of his senses, to see with the microscope tiny objects invisible to the naked eyes, to penetrate with the telescope the vastness of the universe. Still there are realities which even his intellect cannot know: the inner mysteries about God, supernatural realities.

There is another aid for man to know these supernatural realities. This is the gift of faith. With faith we can pierce the innermost secrets of God. We can bring heaven to our level. We can tread the way to eternal life.

We always hear the phrase "to see is to believe." This is philosophically not correct. Seeing and believing are two different acts. It is just like saying "to walk is to talk." The result of seeing or believing is knowing, the perception of a reality. If the motive of believing is the word of God who cannot deceive nor be deceived then we have divine faith. We are made in contact with realities which we could not have known by using merely our natural faculties of the senses and reason. We may know by the use of our reason that there is God but we can never reach the conclusion however much we employ the best of reasonings that there are three persons in one God.

We can pray for this divine faith which is God-given. We can ask to be cured of our spiritual blindness, like Bartimaeus of Jericho, who was cured of his corporal blindness by the merciful hand of Christ.

### THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME October 30, 1994

*First Reading:* DEUTERONOMY 6:2-6

This passage in Deuteronomy contains the *Shema* ("Hear," from the first word of this confession of faith). It was cited by Christ as the first of all the commandments (*Mk* 12:29-30; *Mt* 22:37; *Lk* 10:27). "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord alone! Therefore, you shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength."

In verses 7-9 there is the further injunction to teach this confession of faith to the children to fasten them in their hand and their forehead which gave rise to the *tefillin* or phylacteries some of whom were discovered at Murabba'at in the desert of Judah. They were told to write them on the doorposts (*mezuzah*) of their houses. Later on the *mezuzah* came to mean the tube of wood or metal appended to the doorpost of the house or room containing in 22 lines the texts of *Dt* 6:4-9 and 11:13-21. As they leave or enter the house they touch the tube with their finger tips and then kiss them.

*Second Reading:* HEBREWS 7:23-26

The theme in this passage is the comparison being made between the priesthood in the Old Testament and the priesthood of

Christ in the New. Definitely the priesthood of Christ is more perfect more so because it is eternal and based on an oath made by God himself: "The Lord has sworn an oath, which he will never retract, you are a priest, and for ever" (7:21 quoting Ps 110:4).

Verse 27 entails a difficulty in that the high priest of the Old Testament never offered sacrifice every day for his own sins and for those of the people. This is only done once a year during the Day of Atonement, 10th of Tishri which is the 7th month in the Jewish calendar falling either in the month of September or October. Some commentators now accept "a certain technical inexactitude" of formulation on the part of the author of Hebrews but this does not weaken his doctrine of the permanency and perfection of Christ's priesthood who offered the most perfect sacrifice once and for all (*ephapax*) by offering himself (v. 27).

The Mass then is not considered a repetition of the sacrifice of Christ on the cross but a memorial of that one, perfect sacrifice. This is what he, in fact, commanded: "Do this in memory of me."

#### *Gospel Reading: MARK 12:28-34*

Just like in chapters 2:1 - 3:6, at the beginning of the ministry, there were 5 controversies reported between Jesus and the Jewish authorities, so at the end of his ministry another 5 conflicts are narrated from chapters 11:27 - 12:37. These are: "Question on the authority of Jesus" (11:27-33); "On tribute to Caesar" (12:13-17); "On the resurrection of the dead" (12:18-27); "On the greatest commandment of all" (12:28-34); and "On Christ, not only son but also Lord of David" (12:35-37). Our liturgical text is the fourth of these controversies.

Aside from the *Torah* or the Law of Moses, which is in the Pentateuch from Exodus 20 to Deuteronomy, the Jews have additional prescriptions called the *Taryag Millim*, 248 commands and 365 prohibitions, 613 "words" (*millim*) in all. *TaRYaG* is an aid to memory taking the numerical equivalent of the consonants of the Hebrew alphabet. Hence Tau (400) + Resh (200) + Yod (10) + Gimmel (3) = 613. During the time of our Lord these prescriptions were still in their oral form and only codified later by Rabbi Judah ha-Nasi at the beginning of the 3rd century A.D. constituting the Mishna.

The question then of the scribe is to test Jesus to make a statement, and perhaps put him to ridicule if the answer would be nonsensical, which among this myriad of prescriptions is the first.

Jesus arising to the situation responded with the *Shema* (lit. "Hear," from the first word of this text), a passage in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 which every Jew must learn by heart and added Leviticus 19:18. He thus showed himself to be an orthodox teacher according to the tradition of the Rabbis. The judgment of the erstwhile hostile interrogator of "excellent, teacher," should have put an end to the suspicions of the Jewish authorities on the qualifications of this radical Rabbi. Hence St. Mark could conclude: "And no one had the courage to ask him any more questions."

### *Homily*

One time a student asked me. "How can I really be sure that I love God more than I do my parents? Or how can a husband, for that matter, be sure that he loves God more than his wife, or vice versa?" I gave my answer in this fashion. "Supposing your father tells you to murder somebody, would you obey him?" "Naturally not!" was the answer. Then you love God more than your father. To love God means to obey his commandments. This is clear in St. John: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Remain in my love. If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love" (*Jn* 15:9-10).

But the love of God should grow in us. It is not enough to avoid evil. Just as there is growth in our physical life there must also be growth in our spiritual life. As there is room for perfection of our corporeal faculties so also there is unlimited room for perfection of our spiritual faculties. As the saying goes, "the biggest room in the world is the room for improvement," and the room for improving our spiritual life is limitless.

The faculty which has the act of love is the will. Since it is a spiritual faculty the object of the act of love can never fill it up. The more we love God then the more we will be craving for him. This is what made St. Augustine cry out: "Lord, my heart is restless until it rests in you."

## **HOLY SEE AND CAIRO MEETING**

(Vatican City-CNS) The Holy See will present its position at the UN International Conference on Population Development from the starting point of ethical principles, not religious beliefs, the director of the Holy See's Press Office said.

The Holy See hopes the meeting in Cairo, Egypt, this September will lead to "a consensus on the well-being and progress of the human family," said the spokesman, Dr. Joaquin Navarro-Valls.

Briefing journalists on 8 August, he said the Holy See is opposed to any population-control policies that "do not take into necessary account the moral and material development of society, as well as the dignity of women and the rights of both parents and children... Also, it is unacceptable that the rights of the unborn be completely ignored as if these rights do not in fact exist."

Dr. Navarro-Valls said the basic ethical values underlining the Holy See's position are: the unconditional dignity of every human being, the dignity of human life from conception to natural death, the protection of basic human rights and the promotion of justice and the common good. "These are ethical considerations which are not confessional," he said.

The Holy See's specific concerns with the draft document proposed for the Cairo Conference include: ambiguous definitions of "reproductive health" and "sexual health"; mentioning abortion as an essential component in programmes for "reproductive health"; giving access to all components of "reproductive health," including abortion and contraceptives, to adolescents without parental consent.

After the final planning meeting for the Conference, the terms "reproductive health" and "sexual health" as well as the references to abortion and to adolescents' access to confidential reproductive health services were placed in brackets in the document to indicate a lack of consensus. Dr. Navarro-Valls said that lack of consensus is growing, with many countries declaring positions similar to that of the Holy See.

When the document talks of the need to ensure access to necessary services for women during pregnancy and delivery, the Holy See is in complete agreement, he said. But, he added, "obviously it is not possible to support positions which accept abortion as an essential dimension of health policies on a national or international level and even less as part of international development policies."

Navarro-Valls said the Holy See's delegation does not have an alternative text to present to the Cairo Conference. "Much of this is acceptable and very positive," he said, but the ambiguous language must be cleared up and the rights of the unborn must be protected. (*L'Osservatore Romano*)

## **PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT OPPOSES ABORTION IN CAIRO**

(Manila-CNS) The Philippine Government has told Catholic leaders that its delegation to the 5-13 September International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo will oppose abortion. A statement from the Philippine Department of Health on 25 July said the government delegation "will go to Cairo united against abortion," UCA News, a Thailand-based Asia Church news agency, reported. "We are against abortion," said department undersecretary Jaime Galvez-Tan. The Department is "mandated to protect the health and save the lives of our people," he said. But Church leaders indicate they are unconvinced by the government's assurances. Cardinal Jaime Sin of Manila has called for a pro-life Marian rally on 14 August. Cardinal Sin, in a letter to parents on 25 July, said with endorsement of the Cairo Conference, "every pregnant woman will have the right to kill the unborn child inside her womb... [And] young innocents [will be] exposed to sexual propaganda in its most brutal form." (*L'Osservatore Romano*)