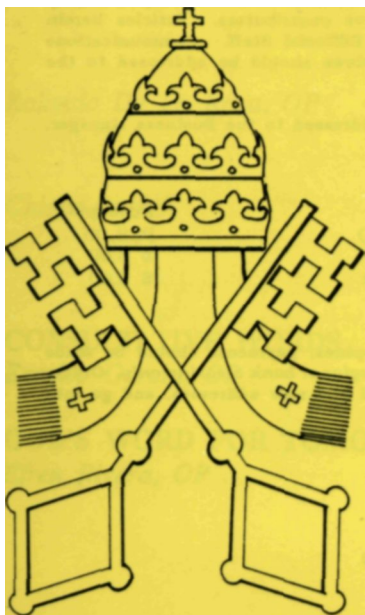


BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

Vol. LXXIII, No. 799

March-April 1997



CURRENT SITUATION OF
FAITH AND THEOLOGY

Card. Joseph Ratzinger

CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE
PHENOMENON OF VIOLENCE
IN SOUTH ASIA

Pontifical Council for the Family

A NEW APPROACH
TO THEOLOGY

Chiara Lubich

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

EDITOR	FR. VICENTE CAJILIG, O.P.
ASSOCIATE EDITORS	FR. HONORATO CASTIGADOR, OP. FR. TAMERLANE LANA, O.P.
EDITORIAL CONSULTANTS	FR. FAUSTO GOMEZ, OP. FR. JOSE MA. TINOKO, O.P.
BUSINESS MANAGER	FR. DANILOTAG-AT.O.P.
ASST. BUSINESS MANAGER	FR. ROBERTO PINTO, O.P.
PUBLICATION ASSISTANTS	ANGELITA R. GUINTO ARNOLD S. MANALASTAS
COVER DESIGN	RODOLFO ATIENZA.O.P.

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS, the Official Interdiocesan Organ, is published bi-monthly by the University of Santo Tomas and is printed at UST Press, Manila, Philippines. Entered as Second Class Mail Matter at the Manila Post Office on June 21, 1946.

Unsolicited manuscripts will not be returned. They will, however, be given courteous and scholarly attention. Writers are reminded that the scope of this review is ecclesiastical and broadly archival. While we wish to inform the whole Church, our readership is largely clerical and this should be borne in mind by prospective contributors. Articles herein published do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Editorial Staff. Communications of an editorial nature concerning articles, cases and reviews should be addressed to the Editor.

Advertising and subscription inquiries should be addressed to the Business Manager.

Subscription Rates

	One Year	Per copy
Philippines:	P/200.00	P38.00
Foreign: (Via Sea Mail)	US\$ 30.00	\$ 6.00
(Via Air Mail)	US\$ 40.00	\$ 8.00

Subscriptions are paid In advance. In the Philippines, payments should be made by postal money order, telegraphic transfer or check with regional bank *clearing only*. Orders for renewal or change of address should include both old and new addresses, and go into effect fifteen days after notification.

Address all communications to:

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS
University of Santo Tomas
Espafla, Manila, Philippines
Tel. No. 731-31-01 local 2S1 ; 740-97-10
E-mail: boletin@ustcc.ust.edu.ph

Table of Contents

EDITOR'S NOTE	124	FEELING ONE WITH THE WORLD
PASTORAL WORDS		
<i>Card. Joseph Ratzinger</i>	125	CURRENT SITUATION OF FAITH AND THEOLOGY
<i>FABC</i>	143	CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO THE PHENOMENON OF VIOLENCE IN SOUTH ASIA
<i>Pontifical Council for the Family</i>	150	FAMILY AND DEMOGRAPHY IN EUROPE
DOCUMENTATION		
	157	CHIARA LUBICH: FOUNDER OF THE FOCOLARE MOVEMENT
<i>Braulio Pena, OP</i>	160	CONFERMENT OF THE DOCTOR HONORIS CAUSA TO CHIARA LUBICH
<i>Rolando De La Rosa, OP</i>	164	CHIARA LUBICH: ONE FROM THE HEARTH
<i>Chiara Lubich</i>	167	A NEW APPROACH TO THEOLOGY
CONSULTATIVE WORDS		
<i>Excelso Garcia, OP</i>	179	CASES & INQUIRIES
GOD'S WORD FOR TOMORROW		
<i>Efren Rivera, OP</i>	188	HOMILETIC AND BIBLIARASAL POINTERS FOR MAY-JUNE 1997

Feeling One with the World

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

While the January-February 1997 issue of our periodical dwelt on the articles for local pastoral needs, like what should be done by the Philippine Church during the coming three years when we prepare for the third millennium, this issue concentrates on articles that will give the readers added global perspectives. For instance, it is necessary to look at the *Current Situation of Faith and Theology* as perceived in the universal church.

Another article entitled *Family and Demography in Europe* gives our local readers a picture of what has happened in the population program, and, reflects the present European demography. This will provide a better conception of the crisis disturbing families.

The publication of the Statement of SABIM (South Asia Bishop's Meeting) will encourage our missionaries working in Asian countries to help solve the problems related to the phenomenon of violence in South Asia.

All in all, the main articles hereby published will help priests, religious and laity develop a global sense. May this sense make all feel united with the joys and pains found in the world today. The model of unity of Chiara Lubich (Founder and President of the Focolare Movement) is something to consider and emulate.

Current Situation of Faith and Theology

CARD. JOSEPH RATZINGER

(The following is a translation of the address given by Cardinal Ratzinger during the meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America, held in Guadalajara, Mexico, in May of this year).

In the '80's, the theology of liberation in its radical forms seemed to be the most urgent challenge for the faith of the Church. It was a challenge that required both a response and a clarification because it proposed a new, plausible and, at the same time, practical response to the fundamental question of Christianity: namely, the problem of redemption. The very word "liberation" wanted to explain in a different and more understandable way that which in the tradition language of the Church was called redemption. In fact, in the background, there is always the same observation: we experience a world that does not correspond to a good God. Poverty, oppression, all kinds of unjust domination, the suffering of the just and the innocent constitute the signs of the times and of all times. And we all suffer: no one can readily say to this world and to his or her own life, "Stay as you are, you are so beautiful". From this the theology of liberation deduced that the situation, which must not continue, could only be overcome through a radical change in the structures of this world which are structures of sin and evil. If sin exerts its power over the structures, and impoverishment is programmed beforehand by them, then its overthrow cannot

come about through individual conversions, but through the struggle against the structures of injustice. It was said, however, that this struggle ought to be political because the structures are consolidated and preserved through politics. Redemption thus became a political process, for which the Marxist philosophy provided the essential guidelines. It was transformed into a task which people themselves could, and even had to take into their own hands and, at the same time, it became a totally practical hope: faith, in theory, became praxis, concrete redeeming action, in the process of liberation.

The fall of the European governmental systems based on Marxism turned out to be a kind of twilight of the gods for that theology of redeeming political praxis. Precisely in those places where the Marxist, liberating ideology had been applied consistently, a radical lack of freedom had been produced, the horror of which now appeared out in the open before the eyes of world public opinion. The fact is that when politics want to bring redemption, they promise too much. When they presume to do God's work, they do not become divine but diabolical. For this reason, the political events of 1989 have also changed the theological scenario. Until then, Marxism had been the last attempt to provide a universally valid formula for the right configuration of historical action. Marxism believed it knew the structure of world history and, from there, it tried to show how history could be led definitively along the right path. The fact that the presumption was based on what was apparently a strictly scientific method that totally substituted faith with science, and made science the praxis, gave it a strong appeal. All the unfulfilled promises of religions seemed attainable through a scientifically based political praxis.

The non-fulfillment of this hope brought a great disillusionment with it which is still far from being assimilated. Therefore, it seems probable to me that new forms of the Marxist conception of the world will appear in the future. For the moment, we cannot be but perplexed: the failure of the only scientifically based system for solving human problems could only justify nihilism or, in any case, total relativism.

Relativism: the prevailing philosophy

Relativism has thus become the central problem for the faith at the present time. No doubt it is not presented only with its aspect of

resignation before the immensity of the truth. It is also presented as a position defined positively by the concepts of tolerance and knowledge through dialogue and freedom, concepts which would be limited if the existence of one valid truth for all were affirmed. Li turn, relativism appears to be the philosophical foundation of democracy. Democracy in fact is supposedly built on the basis that no one can presume to know the true way, and it is enriched by the fact that all roads are mutually recognized as fragments of the efforts toward that which is better. Therefore, all roads seek something common in dialogue, and they also compete regarding knowledge that cannot be compatible in one common form. A system of freedom ought to be essentially a system of positions that are connected with one another because they are relative, as well as being dependent on historical situations open to new developments. Therefore, a liberal society would be a relativist society: only with that condition could it continue to be free and open to the future.

In the area of politics this concept is considerably right. There is no correct political opinion. What is relative - the building up of liberally ordained co-existence between people - cannot be something absolute. Thinking in this way was precisely the error of Marxism and the political theologies. However, with total relativism, everything in the political area cannot be achieved either. There are injustices that will never turn into just things (such as, for example, killing an innocent person, denying an individual or groups the right to their dignity or to life corresponding to that dignity) while, on the other hand, there are just things that can never be unjust. Therefore, although a certain right to relativism in the social and political area should not be denied, the problem is raised at the moment of setting its limits. There has also been the desire to apply this method, in a totally conscious way, in the area of religion and ethics. I will now try to briefly outline the developments that define the theological dialogue today on this point.

The so-called pluralist theology of religion has been developing progressively since the '50's. Nonetheless, only now has it come to the centre of the Christian conscience.¹ In some ways, this conquest occupies today • with regard to the force of its problematic aspect and its presence in the different areas of culture - the place occupied by the theology of liberation in the preceding decade. Moreover, it joins in many ways with it and tries to give it a new, updated form. Its means and methods are very varied; therefore, it is not possible to synthesize it into one short formula or present its essential characteristics briefly. On the one hand, relativism is a typical offshoot of the Western world and its forms of philosophical thought while, on the other, it is connected with the philosophical and religious intuitions of Asia, especially, and surprisingly, with those of the Indian subcontinent. Contact between these two world gives it a particular impulse at the present historical moment

Relativism in theology: the attenuation of Christology

The situation can be clearly seen in one of its founders and eminent representatives, the American Presbyterian J. Hick. His philosophical departure point is found in the Kantian distinction between phenomenon and noumenon: we can never grasp ultimate truth in itself but only its appearance in our way of perceiving through different "lenses". What we grasp is not really and properly reality in itself, but a reflection on

¹ An overview of the most significant authors of the pluralist theology of religion is offered by P. Schmidt-Leukel: "Das Pluralistische Modell in der Theologie der Religionen. Ein Literaturbericht", in: *Theologische Revue* 89 (1993) 353-370. For the discussion cf. M. von Bruck-J. Werbick, *Der eiruiige Weg zum He'd? Die Herausforderung des christlichen Absolutheitsanspruchs durch pluralistische Religionstheologien* (QD 143, Freiburg 1993); K.-H. Menke, *Die Einzigkeit Jesu Christi im Horizont der Sinfrage* (Freiburg 1995), especially pp. 75-176. Menke offers an excellent introduction into the thinking of the two significant representatives of this theology: J. Hick and P.F. Knitter. The following reflections are mainly based on this author. The discussion of the problem in the second part of Menke's book contains many important and relevant elements, but other questions remain open. An interesting systematic attempt to cope with the problem of religions from the Christological point of view is given by B. Stubenrauch, *Dialogisches Dogma. Der christliche Auftrag zur 'mterreligiösen Begegnung* (QD 158, Freiburg 1995). The question will also be treated by a document of the International Theological Commission, which is in preparation.

our scale. At first, Hick tried to formulate this concept in a Christ-centred context. After a year's stay in India, he transformed it - after what he himself calls a Copernican turn of thought - into a new form of theocentrism. The identification of only one historical person, Jesus of Nazareth, with what is "real", the living God, is now relegated as a relapse into myth. Jesus is consciously relativized as one religious leader among others. The Absolute cannot come into history, but only models and ideal forms that remind us about what can never be grasped as such in history. Therefore, concepts such as the Church, dogma, and sacraments must lose their unconditional character. To make an absolute of such limited forms of mediation or, even more, to consider them real encounters with the universally valid truth of God who reveals himself would be the same as elevating oneself to the category of the Absolute, thereby losing the infiniteness of the totally other God.

From this point of view, which is not only present in the works of Hick, but also in other authors, affirming that there is a binding and valid truth in history in the figure of Jesus Christ and in the faith of the Church is described as fundamentalism. Such fundamentalism, which constitutes the real attack on the spirit of modernity, is presented in different ways as the fundamental threat emerging against the supreme good of modernity: i.e., tolerance and freedom. On the other hand, the notion of dialogue - which has maintained a position of significant importance in the Platonic and Christian tradition - changes meaning and becomes both the quintessence of the relativist creed and the antithesis of conversion and mission. In the relativist meaning to dialogue means to put one's own position, i.e., one's faith, on the same level as the convictions of others, without recognizing in principle more truth in it than that which is attributed to the opinion of the others. Only if I suppose in principle that the other can be as right, or more right than I, can an authentic dialogue take place. According to this concept, dialogue must be an exchange between positions which have fundamentally the same rank and, therefore, are mutually relative. Only in this way will the maximum co-operation and integration between the different religions be achieved.² The relativist dissolution of Christology and even

² Cf. the very interesting editorial in *La Civiltà Cattolica* 1 (1996) 107-120: "D cristianesimo e le altre religioni". The editorial examines most of all the thinking of Hick, Knitter and R. Panikkar.

more of ecclesiology thus becomes a central commandment of religion. To return to Hick's thinking, faith in the divinity of one concrete person, as he tells us, leads to fanaticism and particularism, to the disassociation between faith and love, and it is precisely this which must be overcome.³

Recourse to the religions of Asia

In Hick's thinking, whom we are considering here as an eminent representative of religious relativism, there is a strange closeness between Europe's post-metaphysical philosophy and Asia's negative theology. For the latter, the divine can never enter unveiled into the world of appearances in which we live; it always manifests itself in relative reflections and remains beyond all words and notions, in an absolute transcendency.⁴ The two philosophies are fundamentally different both for their departure point and for the orientation they imprint on human existence. Nonetheless, they seem to mutually confirm one another in their metaphysical and religious relativism. The a-religious and pragmatic relativism of Europe and America can get a kind of religious consecration from India which seems to give its renunciation of dogma the dignity of a greater respect before the mystery of God and of man. In turn, the support of European and American thought to the philosophical and theological vision of India reinforces the relativism of all the religious forms proper to the Indian heritage. In this way, it also seems necessary for Christian theology in India to set aside the image of Christ from its exclusive position - which is considered typically Western - in order to place it on the same level as the Indian salvation myths. The historical Jesus - it is now thought - is no more the absolute Logos than any other saving figure of history.⁵

³ Cf. for example J. Hick, *An interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London 1989); Menke, *ibid.*, p. 90.

⁴ Cf. E. Frauwallner, *Geschichte der indischen Philosophie*, 2 volumes (Salzburg 1953 and 1956); S.N. Disgupta, *History of Indian Philosophy*, 5 volumes (Cambridge 1922-1955); K.B. Ramakrishna Rao, *Ontology of Advaita with Special Reference to Maya* (Mulki 1964).

⁵ An author belonging clearly to this trend is F. Wilfred, *Beyond Settled Foundations. The Journey of Indian Theology* (Madras 1993); "Some Tentative Reflections on the Language of Christian Uniqueness: An Indian Perspective" in: Pont. Cons. pro Dialogo inter Religiones, *Pro Dialogo Bulletin* 85-86 (1994/1) 40-57.

Under the sign of the encounter of cultures, relativism appears to be the real philosophy of humanity. As we pointed out earlier, this fact, both in the East and in the West, visibly gives it a strength before which it seems that there is no room for any resistance. Anyone who resists not only opposes democracy and tolerance - i.e., the basic imperatives of the human community - but also persists obstinately in giving priority to one's Western culture and thus rejects the encounter of cultures, which is *well* known to be the imperative of the present moment. Those who want to stay with the faith of the Bible and the Church see themselves pushed, from the start, to a no man's land on the cultural level and must, as a first measure, rediscover the "madness of God" (1 Cor 1:18) in order to recognize the true wisdom in it.

Orthodoxy and orthopraxis

In order to help us in this effort to penetrate the hidden wisdom contained in the madness of the faith, it will be good for us to try to know the relativist theory of Hick's religion better and discover where it leads man. In the end, for Hick, religion means that man goes from "self-centredness", as the existence of the old Adam, to "reality-centredness", as existence of the new man, thus extending from one's self to the otherness of one's neighbour.⁶ It sounds beautiful, but when it is considered in depth, it appears as empty and vacuous as the call to authenticity by Bultmann who, in turn, had taken that concept from Heidegger. For this, religion is not necessary.

Aware of these limits, the former Catholic priest, P. Knitter, tried to overcome the void of a theory of religion reduced to the categorical imperative by means of a new synthesis between Asia and Europe that should be more concrete and internally enriched.⁷ His proposal tends to give religion a new concrete expression by joining the theology of

* J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (Norfolk 1975) pp. 240f; *An Interpretation of Religion*, pp. 236-240; cf. Menke, *ibid.*, pp. 81f.

⁷ The main work of P.F. Knitter: *No Other Name! A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward the World Religions* (New York 1985) has been translated in many languages. Cf. Menke, *ibid.*, pp. 94-110. A refined critical statement is offered also by A. Kolping in his recension in: *Theologische Revue* 87 (1991) 234-240.

pluralist religion with the theologies of liberation. Interreligious dialogue must be simplified radically and become practically effective, by basing it on only one principle: "the primacy of orthopraxis with regard to orthodoxy".⁸ Putting praxis above knowledge in this way is also a clearly Marxist inheritance. However, whereas Marxism makes only what comes logically from renouncing metaphysics concrete - when knowledge is impossible, only action is left - Knitter affirms: the absolute cannot be known but it can be made. The question is: why? Where do I find a just action if I cannot know what is just in an absolute way? The failure of the communist regimes is due precisely to the fact that they tried to change the world without knowing what is good and what is not good for the world, without knowing in what direction the world must be changed in order to make it better. Mere praxis is not light

This is the moment for a critical examination of the notion of orthopraxis. The previous history of religion had shown that the religions of India did not have an orthodoxy in general, but rather an orthopraxis. From there the notion probably entered into modern theology. However, in the description of the religions of India, this had a very precise meaning: it meant that those religions did not have a general, compulsory catechism and belonging to them was not defined by the acceptance of a particular creed. On the other hand, those religions have a system of ritual acts which they consider necessary for salvation and which distinguish a "believer" from a "non-believer". In those religions, a believer is not recognized by certain knowledge but by the scrupulous observance of a ritual which embraces the whole of life. The meaning of orthopraxis, i.e., right acting, is determined with great precision: it is a code of rituals. On the other hand, the word "orthodoxy" originally had almost the same meaning in the early Church and in the Eastern Churches. In the suffix "doxia", "doxa" was not understood in the sense of "opinion" (real opinion). From the Greek viewpoint, opinions are always relative; "doxa" was understood rather in its meaning of "glory, glorification". To be orthodox thus meant to know and practice the right way in which God wants to be glorified. It refers to the cult and, based on the cult, to life. In this sense, there would be a solid point for a fruitful dialogue between East and West.

• Cf. Menke, *ibid.*, p. 95.

But let us return to the meaning of the term "orthopraxis" in modern theology. No one thinks any longer about following a ritual. The word has taken on a new meaning which has nothing to do with the authentic Indian concept. To tell the truth, something does remain from it: if the requirement of orthopraxis has a meaning and does not wish to be the lid over its not being obligatory, then a common praxis must also be given, that is recognizable by all, which surpasses the general wordiness of "centring on self" and "reference to another". If the ritual meaning which was given to it in Asia is excluded, then praxis can only be understood as ethics or politics. In the first case, orthopraxis would imply an "ethos" that is clearly defined with regard to its content. This is no doubt excluded in the relativist, ethical discussion since there is no longer anything good or evil in itself. However, if orthopraxis is understood in a social and political sense, it again raises the question regarding the nature of correct political action. The theologies of liberation, animated by the conviction that Marxism clearly points out to us what good political praxis is, could use the notion of orthopraxis in its proper sense. In this case, it was not a question of not being obligatory, but a form set down for everyone of correct practice, or "orthopraxis" that brought the community together and distinguished it from those who rejected the correct way of acting. To this extent, the Marxist theologies of liberation were, in their own way, logical and consistent.

As we can see, however, this kind of orthopraxis rests on a certain orthodoxy - in the modern sense: a framework of obligatory theories regarding the path to freedom. Knitter is close to this principle when he affirms that the criterion for differentiating orthopraxis from pseudopraxis is freedom.⁹ Nonetheless, he still has to explain to us in a convincing and practical way what freedom is and the purpose of real human liberation: surely not Marxist orthopraxis, as we have seen. Nonetheless, something is clear: the relativist theories all flow into a state of not being obligatory and thus become superfluous, or else they presume to have an absolute standard which is not found in the praxis, by elevating it to an absolutism that has really no place. Actually, it is a fact that in Asia concepts of the theology of liberation are also

» Cf. Menke, *ibid.*, p. 109.

proposed today as forms of Christianity which are presumably more suitable to the Asian spirit, and they place the nucleus of religious action in the political sphere. When mystery no longer counts, politics must be converted into religion. And there is no doubt that this is deeply opposed to the original Asian religious vision.

New Age

The relativism of Hick, Knitter and related theories are ultimately based on a rationalism which declares that reason - in the Kantian meaning - is incapable of metaphysical cognition.¹⁰ The new foundation of religion comes about by following a pragmatic path with more ethical or political overtones. However, there is also a consciously anti-rationalist response to the experience of the slogan, "Everything is relative", which comes together under the pluriform denomination of "new age".¹¹

For the supporters of the New Age, the solution to the problem of relativity must not be sought in a new encounter of the self with another, or others, but by overcoming the subject, in an ecstatic return to the cosmic dance. Like the old gnosis this way pretends to be totally attuned to all the results of science and to be based on all kinds of scientific knowledge (biology, psychology, sociology, physics). But on the basis of this presupposition it offers at the same time a considerably anti-rationalist model of religion, a modern "mystic": The Absolute is not to be believed, but to be experienced. God is not a person to be distinguished from the world, but a spiritual energy present in the

¹⁰ Both Knitter and Hick base their rejection of the Absolute in history on Kant; cf. Menke, *ibid.*, pp. 78 and 108.

¹¹ In the middle of this century the concept of "New Age" or the "Age of Aquarius" has been introduced by Raul Le Cour (1937) and Alice Bailey who, in messages received in 1945, spoke about a new world order and a new world religion. Between 1960 and 1970 the Esalen Institute was established in California. Today Marilyn Ferguson is the best known representative of "New Age". Michael FuB ("New Age: Supermarkt alternativer Spiritualität", in: *Communo* 20 [1991] 148-157) defines "New Age" as the result of a mixture of Judaeo-Christian elements with the process of secularization, with gnosticism and with elements of Oriental religions. The pastoral letter, translated into many languages, of Cardinal G. Danneels, *Le Christ ou le Verseau* (1990), offers useful orientations for this problem. Cf. also Menke, *ibid.*, pp. 31-36; J. Le Bar (ed.) *Cults, Sects and the New Age* (Huntington, Indiana).

universe. Religion means the harmony of myself with the cosmic whole, the overcoming of all separations. K.H. Menke characterizes very well this change in history that is taking place, as he states: "The subject that wanted to submit everything to himself, now wants to be placed into 'the whole'".¹² Objective reason closes off the path for us to the mystery of reality; the self isolates us from the richness of cosmic reality, destroys the harmony of the whole, and is the real cause of our unredemption. Redemption is found in unbridling the self, immersion in the exuberance of that which is living, and in a return to the whole. Ecstasy is sought, the inebriety of the infinite which can be experienced in inebriating music, rhythm, dance, frenetic lights and dark shadows, and in the human mass. This is not only renouncing modernity but man himself. The gods return. They have become more believable than God. The primitive rites must be renewed in which the self is initiated into the mystery of the Whole and is liberated from itself.

There are many explanations for the re-editing of pre-Christian religions and cultures which is being attempted frequently today. If there is no common truth in force precisely because it is true, then Christianity is only something imported from outside, a spiritual imperialism which must be thrown off with no less force than political imperialism. If no contact with the living God of all men takes place in the sacraments, then they are empty rituals which tell us nothing nor give us anything. At most, they let us perceive what is numinous, which prevails in all religions. Even in that case, it seems more sensible to look for what is originally one's own instead of letting something alien and antiquated be imposed upon oneself. Above all, if the "sober inebriety" of the Christian mystery cannot elevate us to God, then the true inebriety of real ecstasies must be sought whose passion sweeps us away and transforms us - at least for a moment - into gods, and lets us perceive for a moment the pleasure of the infinite and forget the misery of the finite. The more manifest the uselessness of political absolutism, the

¹² "Das Subjekt, das sich alles unterwerfen wollte, will sich nun in 'das Ganze' aufheben", Menke, *ibid.*, p. 33.

stronger the attraction will be to what is irrational and to the renunciation of the reality of every day life.¹³

Pragmatism in the daily life of the Church

Together with these radical solutions and the great pragmatism of the theologies of liberation, there is also the grey pragmatism of the daily life of the Church in which everything apparently continues normally but in reality the faith is being consumed and falling into meanness. I am thinking of two phenomena which I consider with concern. First, there is the intention, with different degrees of intensity, to extend the principle of the majority to the faith and customs in order to ultimately "democratize" the Church in a decisive way. What does not seem obvious to the majority cannot be obligatory. This is what seems to be. But, which majority? Will there be a majority tomorrow like the one today? A faith which we ourselves can decide about is not a faith in absolute. And no minority has any reason to let the faith be imposed on it by a majority. The faith, together with its praxis, either comes to us from the Lord through his Church and the sacramental ministry, or it does not exist in absolute. The abandonment of the faith by many is based on the fact that it seems to them that the faith should be decided by some requests, which would be like a kind of party programme: whoever has power decides what must be part of the faith. Therefore, it is important within the Church itself to arrive at power or, on the contrary - which is more logical and obvious - to not believe.

The other point on which I wished to draw your attention refers to the Liturgy. The different phases of liturgical reform have let the opinion be introduced that the Liturgy can be changed arbitrarily. From being something unchangeable, in any case, it is a question of the words of consecration; all the rest could be change. The following thinking is logical: if a central authority can do this, why not a local one? And if the local ones can do this, why not the community itself? Community

¹³ Two different expressions of "New Age" can be distinguished more and more clearly: the first is the gnostic-religious form that searches for transcendental and transpersonal being and for the true self; the second one is the ecological-monistic expression that worships matter and Mother Earth and is coupled with feminism in the form of the ecofeminism.

should be expressed and come together in the Liturgy. Following the rationalist and puritanical tendency of the '70's and even the '80's, today there is weariness with the pure, spoken liturgy and a living liturgy is sought which does not delay in coming closer to the New Age tendencies: what is inebriating and ecstatic is sought and not the "logike latreia", the "rationabilis oblatio" about which Paul speaks and with him the Roman liturgy (cf. Rom 12:1).

I admit that I am exaggerating. What I am saying does not describe the normal situation of our communities. But the tendencies are there. For this reason, vigilance is required so that a Gospel will not be surreptitiously introduced to us — a stone instead of bread — different from the one that the Lord gave us.

Tasks of theology

We find ourselves, all told, in a unique situation: the theology of liberation tried to give Christianity, that was tired of dogmas, a new praxis whereby redemption would finally take place. But that praxis has left ruin in its aftermath instead of freedom. Relativism remains and the attempt to conform to it, but what it offers us is so empty that the relativist theories are looking for help from the theology of liberation in order to be able to put it into practice. The New Age says finally: it is better for us to leave the failed experiment of Christianity and return again to the gods, because we live better in this way. Many questions come up. Let us take the most practical one: Why has classical theology appeared to be so defenseless in the face of these happenings? Where is its weak point, and why has it lost credibility?

I would like to mention two evident points in the writings of Hick and Knitter. Both authors, for their attenuated faith in Christ, refer to exegesis. They state that exegesis has proven that Jesus did not consider himself absolutely the son of God, the incarnate God, but that he was made to be such afterwards, in a gradual way, by his disciples.¹⁴ Both Hick, in a clearer way, and Knitter also refer to philosophical evidence. Hick assures us that Kant proved beyond dispute that what is absolute or the Absolute can neither be recognized in history nor can it appear

¹⁴ See quotations in Menke, *ibid.*, pp. 90 and 97.

in history as such.¹⁵ Because of the structure of our cognition, what the Christian faith maintains cannot be, according to Kant. Therefore, miracles, mysteries or sacraments are superstitions, as Kant clarifies for us in his work, *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*.¹⁶ It seems to me that the questions from exegesis and the limits and possibilities of our reason, i.e., the philosophical premises of the faith, indicate in fact the crucial point of the crisis of contemporary theology whereby the faith — and more and more the faith of simple persons as well — is heading towards crisis.

Now I would only like to outline the task before us. First, with regard to exegesis, let it be said from the outset that Hick and Knitter cannot be supported by exegesis in general, as if there were a clear result shared by all. This is impossible in historical research, which does not have this type of certainty, and it is even more impossible with regard to a question that is not purely historical or literary but includes value choices that go beyond a mere verification of the past and a mere interpretation of texts. However, it is certain that an overall glance at modern exegesis can leave an impression that is close to Hick's and Knitter's.

What type of certainty corresponds to this? Let us suppose - which can be doubted - that most exegetes think in this way. Nonetheless, the question still remains: On what is that majority opinion grounded? My thesis is the following: the fact that many exegetes think like Hjek and Knitter and reconstruct the history of Jesus as they do, is because they share their same philosophy. It is not the exegesis that proves the philosophy but the philosophy that generates the exegesis." If I know *a priori* (to speak like Kant) that Jesus cannot be God, and that miracles, mysteries and sacraments are three forms of superstition, then I cannot

¹⁵ Cf. note 10.

» B 302.

"This can be seen very clearly in the confrontation between A. Schlatter and A. von Harnack at the end of the last century, presented carefully by W. Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter. Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche* (Stuttgart 1996) pp. 301ff. I have tried to show my own view of the problem in the *Quaestio disputata* edited by myself: *Schriftauslegung im Widerstreit* (Freiburg 1989) pp. 15-44. Cf. also the collective of I. de la Potterie - G. Guardini - J. Ratzinger - G. Colombo - E. Bianchi, *L'esegesi cristiana oggi* (Piemme 1991).

discover what cannot be a fact in the sacred books. I can only describe why and how such affirmations were arrived at, and how they were gradually formed

Let us look at this more precisely. The historical-critical method is an excellent instrument for reading historical sources and interpreting texts. But it contains its own philosophy which, in general - for example when I try to study the history of medieval emperors - is hardly important. And this is because, in that case, I want to know the past and nothing more. But even this cannot be done in a neutral way and so there are also limits to the method. But if it is applied to the Bible, two factors come clearly to light which would not be noted otherwise. First, the method wants to find out about the past as something past. It wants to grasp with the greatest precision what happened at a past moment, closed in its past situation, at the point where it was found in time. Furthermore, it supposes that history is, in principle, uniform; therefore, man with all his differences and the world with all its distinctions are determined by the same laws and limitations so that I can eliminate whatever is impossible. What cannot happen today in any way could not happen yesterday, nor will it happen tomorrow.

If we apply this to the Bible, it means the following: a text, a happening, a person will be strictly fixed in his or her past. There is the desire to verify what the past author said at that time and what he could have said or thought. This is what is "historical" about the "past". Therefore, historical-critical exegesis does not bring the Bible to today, to my current life. This is impossible. On the contrary, it separates it from me and shows it strictly fixed in the past. This is the point on which Drewermann rightly criticized historical-critical exegesis to the extent that it presumes to be self-sufficient. Such exegesis, by definition, expresses reality, not today's or mine, but yesterday's, another's reality. Therefore, it can never show the Christ of today, tomorrow and always, but only - if it remains faithful to itself - the Christ of yesterday.

To this the second supposition must be added: the homogeneity of the world and history, i.e., what Bultmann calls the modern image of the world. M. Waldstein has shown, through a careful analysis, that Bultmann's theory of knowledge was totally influenced by the Neo-

Kantianism of Marburg." Thanks to him, he knew what could and could not exist. In other exegetes, the philosophical awareness is less pronounced, but the foundation based on the theory of Kantian cognition is always implicitly present, as an unquestionable, hermeneutic access to criticism. This being as it is, the authority of the Church can no longer impose from without that a Christology of divine filiation should be arrived at. But it can and must invite a critical examination of one's method. In short, in the revelation of God, he, the Living and True One, bursts into our world and also opens the prison of our theories with whose nets we want to protect ourselves against God's coming into our lives. Thank God, in the midst of the current crisis of philosophy and theology, a new meaning of foundation has been set in motion in exegesis itself and, not in the last term, through knowledge attained from the careful historical interpretation of texts.¹⁹ This helps break the prison of previous philosophical decisions,, which paralyze interpretation: the amplitude of the word is opening up again.

The problem of exegesis is connected, as we have seen, with the problem of philosophy. The indigence of philosophy, the indigence to which paralyzed, positivist reason has led itself, has turned into the indigence of our faith. The faith cannot be liberated if reason itself does not open up again. If the door to metaphysical cognition remains closed, if the limits of human knowledge set by Kant are impassable, faith is destined to atrophy: it simply lacks air to breathe. When a strictly autonomous reason, which does not want to know anything about the faith, tries to get out of the bog of uncertainty "by pulling itself up by its hair" - to express it in some way, it will be difficult for this effort to succeed. For human reason is not autonomous in absolute. It is always found in a historical context. The historical context disfigures its vision (as we have seen). Therefore, it also needs historical assistance

* M. Waldstein, "The Foundations of Bultmann's Work", in *Commurdo Am* (1987) 115-134.

¹⁹ Cf. for example the collective edited by C.E. Braaten and R.W. Jenson: *Reclaiming the Bible for the Church* (Cambridge, USA, 1995), especially the article of B.S. Childs, "On Reclaiming the Bible for Christian Theology", pp. 1-17.

to help it cross over its historical barriers.²⁰ I am of the opinion that Neo-Scholastic rationalism failed in its attempts to reconstruct the "praembula fidei" with wholly independent reasoning, with pure rational certainty. The attempts that presume to do the same will have the same result. Yes, Karl Barth was right to reject philosophy as the foundation of faith independent from faith. If it were such, our faith would be based, from the beginning to the end, on the changing philosophical theories. But Barth was wrong when, for this same reason, he proposed the faith as a pure paradox that can only exist against reason and totally independent from it. It is not the lesser function of the faith to care for reason as such. It does not do violence to it; it is not external to it; rather, it makes it return to itself. The historical instrument of the faith can liberate reason as such again so that by introducing it to the path, it can see by itself once again. We must make efforts towards a new dialogue of this kind between faith and philosophy because both need one another reciprocally. Reason will not be saved without the faith, but the faith without reason will not be human.

Perspective

If we consider the present cultural situation, about which I have tried to give some indications frankly it must seem to be a miracle that there is still Christian faith, despite everything, and not only in the surrogate forms of Hick, Knitter and others, but the complete, serene faith of the New Testament, and of the Church of all times. Why, in brief, does the faith still have a chance? I would say the following: because it is in harmony with what man is. Man is something more than what Kant and the various post-Kantian philosophers wanted to see and concede. Kant himself must have recognized this in some way with his postulates. In man there is an inextinguishable yearning for the

^M Even though in the thinking of H.J. Verweyen, *Gottes letztes Wort* (Dusseldorf 1991) many important and valid elements can be found, to me its essential philosophical error consists in attempting to offer a rational foundation of the faith independently of faith, an attempt that however cannot convince in its pure abstract rationality. The thinking of Verweyen is also mentioned by K.H. Menke, *ibid.*, pp. 111-176. To me the position of J. Pieper (*Schriften zum Philosophiebegriff*, Hamburg 1998) has a better foundation and is more convincing from the historical and objective point of view.

infinite. None of the answers attempted are sufficient. Only the **God** himself who became finite in order to open our finiteness and lead us to the breadth of his infiniteness responds to the question of our being. For this reason, the Christian faith finds man today, too. Our task is to serve the faith with a humble spirit and the whole strength of **our** heart and understanding.

South Asia Bishops' Meeting (SABIM): Christian Response to the Phenomenon of Violence in South Asia

FABC

FINAL STATEMENT

1. Between 16-22 September 1996, we, 26 bishops from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal, met in Kathmandu, Nepal, to study and reflect on the theme: "Christian response to the Phenomenon of Violence in South Asia." Assisted by resource persons, we addressed questions related to the nature and varieties of violence in the South Asian context, the growing phenomenon of religious fundamentalism, and principles for a Christian response.

2. Nature of violence. Violence is any encroachment on the fundamental rights of an individual or a group. It is the control and subjugation of one human person to the will of another, which diminishes both the dignity of the oppressed and the humanity of the oppressor. As such, violence is a transgression against the created order established by God.

3. Kinds of violence. When referring to violence, we immediately think of physical violence against the body, including, in its most extreme form, murder. We recognize, however, that there are forms of **moral** and **psychological** violence which can be even more degrading than the purely physical. Moreover, violence is not only a desecration of individuals, but also of whole groups in society. Among the forms of violence which we find around us, we note in particular.

a. social violence, in which an individual or group is ostracized, demeaned, and made the object of discrimination,

b. cultural violence, where a people's values and traditions are invaded, degraded, or destroyed by other groups.

c. religious violence, where one is denied religious freedom and made to suffer for one's beliefs, where people are looked down upon or discriminated against in law because of their faith,

d. economic violence, where people are denied, because of caste or social group, opportunities granted to others, given inadequate pay, and forced to take only the lowliest, most menial work,

e. political violence, where persons are dismissed from their positions, arrested, tortured, and deprived of their rights because of their political beliefs.

f. ethnic violence, when people are expelled from their lands or subject to discrimination because their ethnic group is considered threatening or inferior.

g. gender violence, when the dignity and rights of women are violated, when they are paid less for the same work, sexually harassed, denied educational opportunities, or viewed as inferior to or of lesser status than men,

h. violence against children, when they are forced into labour, often in subhuman conditions, or subjected to physical abuse at home or school or to sexual abuse by paedophiles and sex tourists,

i. violence to the unborn in abortion, particularly in the widespread modern practices of female foeticide and infanticide.

j. state violence of oppressive and discriminatory laws, ruthless or biased law enforcement, unrestricted police practices, summary arrests, long-delayed trials, the undue use of armed forces to deal with internal disturbances, the suppression of right to dissent and freedom of association, excessive militarization, and the most pervasive of all, corruption in public life,

k. violence to one's self-image and self-respect, which makes individuals and social groups feel themselves inferior, backward, and "dispensable,"

1. violence against the homeland, in uprooting and evicting a people from their lands and homes on the pretext of "progress" or the "common good."

m. ecological violence, when nature and its resources are greedily exploited for personal profit, without concern for future generations, for contemporaries whose survival depends on a careful husbanding of the earth's resources, or for the beauty and variety of creation.

4. Victims of violence. We chose the theme of violence because of the unhappy reality that individuals and social groups are increasingly becoming victims of various forms of violence. Among the groups who today are experiencing systematic violence used against them as a method of control are minorities, dalits, tribals, adivasis, women, children, the unborn, bonded laborers, domestic workers, refugees and migrants, prisoners, and all those in unorganized labour and in low income groups.

5. Christian response to violence. Confronted by aggression on their traditional sources of livelihood and their basic human rights and dignity, guaranteed by numerous united nations declarations on human rights and by the constitutions of their respective countries, we want to offer a Christian response.

The Old Testament permits violence in the defense of one's land, religion, and culture, yet the prophets looked forward to a time when "swords would be beaten into plowshares." In the New Testament, Jesus states unequivocally that "those who live by the sword will perish by the sword" and blesses the peacemakers, "for they shall be called God's children." Yet Christ has not come to gloss over iniquity and injustice. He claims to bring not peace but fire and the sword and he expels those who were profaning the Temple. The norm of "an eye for an eye" must, in the new dispensation, give way to the law of forgiveness, mercy and love.

A dominant characterization of Christ is that of someone who is firmly and unshakeably rooted in truth - come what may - and for that

reason he is also the true liberator of the down-trodden. Jesus, the Liberator, in order to overcome the evil of violence, does not inflict violence on others, but rather accepts and transforms it by personally undergoing suffering in the way of non-violence. Li Jesus God himself is in solidarity with the victims of violence and his passion and death is a liberative suffering, liberating both aggressor and victim.

Over the centuries, a well-developed Christian response to violence has been formulated for concrete situations and in specific socio-cultural contexts. It has taken into account the principles of self-defence, the rights of the victim and society at large, the ineffectiveness of all other legitimate means to secure justice and equity, the just proportion to be observed in any response to violence, both in quality and intensity, and the real possibility of success which such a response may have. These and other generally accepted contemporary guidelines in the field of ethics and morals, should form the basis for the formation of consciences in this matter, so that in each concrete situation a mature response can be reached.

What seems clear from all this is that the proper Christian response to violence is neither that of further violence nor that of simple passive acquiescence. The Christian response sometimes will demand "strong actions" of non-violent protest, such as fasting and prayer vigils, hunger strikes, sit-ins, protest marches and rallies. If such are to be successful, actions of strong advocacy require careful preparation and organization, deep commitment, self-discipline, and a readiness to suffer for one's principles. (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2306).

We admit that there are unresolved questions in the area of our Christian response to violence which require further study. We call upon the FABC Theological Advisory Commission and upon our national theological associations and episcopal doctrinal commissions to pursue a profound research into the realm of violence.

6. Education which provides moral and spiritual awakening is a key apostolate of the Church to bring about authentic personal and social transformation and the values of the Gospel among peoples. Given the widespread violence in our societies, we need to reorientate our educational apostolate in order to form persons and societies in true moral and spiritual values to be able to serve life by opposing all forms of

violence and establishing peace, harmony and love. Special attention should be given to education for indigenous and other marginalized peoples.

We must promote literacy and primary education for all, and specific higher and specialized education to prepare agents to build a just society and to serve the poor and oppressed. The larger communities of our educational institutions, namely students, teachers, administration, parents and guardians, well-wishers and former students, are to be brought into this arena of moral and spiritual formation and become one in mind and heart among themselves through a process of interreligious, intercultural, and intersocial dialogue.

6. Formation of lay leaders. Shared power - political, economic, and social - is one of the pre-requisites for a genuine transformation of society. Men and women, especially from the oppressed classes, who show promise, should be motivated and helped to attain positions of influence where they can work with commitment for the common good of all citizens.

Political structures are not the only ones to bring about changes in society. Civic organizations like citizens' committees, consumer welfare societies, cooperatives, human rights organizations, legal aid societies, and neighborhood groups are powerful means for promoting the common good. We encourage Christians to work with all persons of good will in such associations.

Christians should generously deploy their resources in order to uplift the underprivileged, who should be trained to become self-reliant. We view it as a genuine commitment of faith, a true vocation, when Christian laity choose to remain at the service of their own people to work for their uplift.

8. Media. Many people, irrespective of their religious, political, and social affiliations, have rightly shown concern at the incalculable harm that is being done by some media presentations. Violence, sex, and a consumerist mentality are being foisted upon the young and the old by television, films and the print media. Positive steps should be taken to stem this evil tide.

At the same time, it has to be admitted that a media-conscious society is here to stay. The enormous potential of the media for good has also to be recognized and rigorously pursued. We note with gratitude the presence of a large number of persons of good will in the secular media industry and we acknowledge their good efforts to produce wholesome programs with humane values which could counteract the culture of violence.

Media education at the national, diocesan and parish level should be fostered. The vast potential of the pastoral media should be well utilized. Clergy, religious, and lay leaders should be given suitable training in the media. The right use of media should be a regular feature in implementing the pastoral programs in the diocese.

Various organizations and even governments are unquestionably influenced by world opinion. The international community can be an effective deterrent against dictators and oppressors. For this to be effective, the media should be used to highlight injustices, and world opinion should be harnessed to restrain unjust regimes. Church related media structures are encouraged to work with the secular media to defend human rights and oppose violence and injustice.

9. Christian commitment to a just society. All our FABC documents have underlined the importance of promoting total human liberation. The Church in Asia is called to be on the side of all those who are oppressed and victims of violence. We are called to be in solidarity with them in their struggle to overcome the violence inflicted on them, which condemns them to remain at the margin of life: famine, disease, illiteracy, poverty, displacement and other injustices.

Solidarity with the oppressed and marginalized, involvement in their struggle for justice and their rights, reawakening the consciences of society for their causes - all these are means of expressing the integral salvation which God offers to humanity in Jesus Christ our Savior. The Church in Asia must take the lead to help these peoples become an effective social force.

10. Reducing tensions in the South Asia region. Coming as we do, from the five nations of South Asia, we are painfully aware of (he suspicions, tensions, and hostility that exist between some of the

countries of our region. We Christians, who form one community in Christ that is not limited by national borders or inhibited by international politics, must work to reduce these tensions. A priority would seem to be the sharing of sound information so that our people need not depend on rumors and biased propaganda. A SABIM newsletter might help us become better informed about our fellow Christians in neighboring countries. We feel the need that the SABIM conference be held every 2-3 years, more often should the need arise.

Public opinion should be formed to oppose the regional arms race and military build-up that not only perpetuates and exacerbates tensions, but is a wasteful use of funds that should properly be used for education, health care, housing and economic infrastructure. The bishops' conferences might consider the possibility of a joint appeal to reduce military spending and demand total nuclear disarmament

To the extent possible, we should encourage NGOs, private associations, and church organizations to undertake cultural, athletic, and academic exchanges between people of the countries of the region, so that by coming to know one another personally our people will be better prepared to overcome stereotype and lay the basis for peace and joint action toward the integral human development of the region.

Conclusion. Life-destroying violence is a grave sinfulness of our times from which humankind needs to be redeemed. We condemn violence of all kinds, especially its extreme forms of the killing of innocents, abortion and terrorism. We pray for the gift and power of God to lead us to that healing redemption. We pray that we become instruments and ministers of that healing for our brothers and sisters burdened with the grave suffering of violence. Through a spirit of prayer and penance and sincere commitment to life-giving self-sacrifice may we become, in the likeness of Jesus our Savior, suffering prophets and servants among our suffering peoples.

Family and Demography in Europe

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE FAMILY

The Pontifical Council for the Family has convened meetings on "the family and demography" in various continents: Latin America, held in Mexico City in 1993, and Asia and Oceania, held in Taipei in 1995. The third meeting in this series, on "the family and demography in Europe", was held in Rome on 17-19 October 1996. From most European nations, Bishops who are Presidents of Commissions for the Family and' representatives of the Roman dicasteries met with experts in demography, economics, political science, theologians and moralists. At the conclusion of the meeting, the following recommendations were approved unanimously by the 70 participants.

Recommendations

As participants in the meeting convened by the Pontifical Council for the Family on "the Family and Demography in Europe", we have carefully considered the situation in this continent. We make the following recommendations with a sense of urgency and deep concern.

1. The world situation

First we recommend that any study of population trends in Europe must be seen in the context of the current world demographic situation.

1.1. World population growth is based principally on three factors: the rise of life expectancy, which is mainly the consequence of the fall

of infant mortality, and the phenomenon of the "population momentum", brought about by a greater number of mothers than in previous generations. At the same time a decline of the rate of natural increase is observable almost everywhere because women are having fewer children.

1.2. For these and other reasons, the United Nations projections for the growth of the world's population now favour moderate to low projections for population growth rather than the alarmist exaggerations which were current several years ago. Unfortunately these exaggerations continue to be invoked by some agencies.

2. Europe today

Secondly, we recommend that the demographic situation in Europe must be described clearly and objectively. To this end, we underline the following realities.

2.1. According to the unanimous view of the experts, the demographic situation in Europe is a matter of great concern. Some even speak of a "demographic winter".

2.2. Falling fertility rates are found in all Western and Central European countries. The same trends have begun in Eastern Europe, accompanied by an influx of Western consumerism. With a few exceptions, the synthetic fertility index is lower than that required for the replacement of the generations.

2.3. At the same time, there is a higher life expectancy and Europe is marked by an aging population. The aged persons' dependency ratio is increasing. In some countries more than 15% of the population are older than 65. An increasing proportion of aged people creates a serious demographic imbalance.

2.4. These problems coincide with a fall in the number of marriages over the past 25 years. The marriage rates are declining. In some Western European countries the majority of young people choose cohabitation rather than marriage. These arrangements are often childless and may last for some years. Since the 1970's there has been a sharp rise in the number of children born outside marriage. The fragile

relationship of cohabitation coincides with higher rates of divorce. Statistics show more single-person households.

2.5. The average age at which women marry has risen steadily. Moreover women postpone childbearing. This means that it takes longer for the replacement of the generations.

2.6. The most important demographic phenomenon in Europe, which is of concern to all demographers, is the smaller base of younger people that must support an ever-growing number of aged persons. This phenomenon is described as the "inverted pyramid".

2.7. Due to higher levels of prosperity, emigration to countries outside Europe has slowed down generally. At the same time emigration from regions where there is unemployment is usually to other European countries where workers are needed.

2.8. Immigration helps to sustain the population of some European countries. Political and economic reasons account for the large immigrant population who came into Germany from the Balkans. Germans from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union have returned to Germany in large numbers. The presence of many workers from Southern Europe in certain countries is an example of the fluid movement of populations within Europe as people seek work in a changing situation.

3. Causes and effects

Thirdly, we recommend that the causes and effects of the population situation in Europe should be analyzed carefully. To this, end, we indicate the following major factors.

3.1. One of the most important factors behind the demographic crisis in Europe is the role of women. The factors which lead women to work outside the home have resulted in a lower birth rate. An overemphasis on a woman's activities outside the home has brought about less esteem for motherhood and a woman's role in the home.

3.2. At the same time, the lower number of children per family is linked to the demands of a consumerist society and higher costs of raising children. In regions once noted for a positive attitude to childbearing, "one or two children" is now "the rule". The mass media and

advertising reinforce this social convention and housing is designed for the small family.

3.3. Within the shrinking European family, the child is often deprived of brothers and sisters and lacks the socializing community offered by the larger family.

3.4. The ideological factors behind Europe's "demographic winter" must never be forgotten. Europe is currently dominated by well-placed minority groups opposed to the family. The individualistic model of the person can frequently be linked to the anti-life mentality and anti-life propaganda. Radical feminists and others have gained legalized abortion. New chemical methods of abortion are being more widely used.

3.5. Attempts to legalize euthanasia follow legalized abortion. In the context of Europe's demographic crisis, there is an increasing tendency to make the aged, the disabled and the seriously ill feel they are "a burden on society" and that they should "choose" to die.

3.6. The contraceptive revolution and its effects on attitudes is another factor behind the demographic crisis in Europe. Couples are having fewer children than they originally wished.

3.7. A sterile sexuality is also promoted by the mass media and through promiscuity, pornography and homosexuality.

3.8. The social and economic effects of demographic imbalance are already of concern to some governments. A higher proportion of elderly people makes heavy demands on the social welfare services. At the same time a shrinking workforce is under greater pressure to sustain the welfare system through taxation. A further effect of the demographic phenomenon of the "inverted pyramid" is the loss of intergenerational wisdom and experience.

3.9. Immigration can have positive effects in assisting the economies of countries with low fertility rates and in enriching the local culture. But donor countries often suffer the loss of skilled workers. Moreover, migrants are often the objects of hostility and a fear that they are gaining economic advantages leads to increasing racism and religious intolerance.

3.10. Considerable amounts of money are given by the European Union in order, directly or indirectly, to control population growth in developing countries. Li fact these programmes, presenting themselves almost always as "aid", are the expression of a kind of neo-colonialism which violates the sovereignty of other nations and the just autonomy of married couples,

3.11. We are deeply concerned that, by taking this position, the European Union jeopardizes the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* of 1948. Specific threats are: the misuse of "consensus" as the source of law; the distortion of the meaning of the *Universal Declaration*; the introduction of spurious "rights" with regard to "reproductive health", homosexuality and abortion; the redefinition of "family"; the "gender" ideology, etc.

3.12. It seems paradoxical that some European nations with falling birthrates are the leaders in exporting population control policies. In collusion with international organizations and pharmaceutical companies, they fund contraception, sterilization and even abortion in developing countries, while promoting an outdated Malthusian population ideology.

3.13. Thus, in the face of widespread indifference to reality, Europe's demographic crisis has been compared to the *Titanic*, when those on board continued to order more champagne as the ship steadily sank. But, in the case of Europe, the ship need not sink.

4. Towards a future of hope and growth

Finally, we make some concrete proposals which can help overcome the demographic crisis which besets Europe today.

4.1. The rebirth of Europe depends largely on a rediscovery of the family, the sanctuary of life, the cradle of humanity, and sign of hope for the future.

4.2. As various modern studies indicate, the family is the true source of the real wealth of Europe: mature and responsible men and women. In the words of Pope John Paul n, the family is the "school of the virtues", which promotes social growth, peace and prosperity. In the family, children can be schooled in the values and traditions of Christian Europe, on which the future depends.

4.3. But politicians' fine words "in favour of the family" are not enough. The family itself needs to be supported by specific long-term family policies, including: tax reform, adequate family housing, with emphasis on the special needs of young families, family credit, family subsidies and maternity allowances, etc.

4.4. The role of women as wives and mothers should be sustained by family policy, and all discrimination against women who work in the home should be eliminated. There is a need to take special measures to integrate the activities of women outside the home with their work at home, a question that is currently being followed by the Pontifical Council for the Family.

4.5. The role of men as husbands and fathers in the home is increasing. This phenomenon must be recognized and men should be supported in their family activities.

4.6. We recognize that there still exists a substantial number of European families with three or more children. As the key to a better demographic future, these families should enjoy not only the support of the Church, but also concrete advantages written into pro-family legislation.

4.7. At base, the demographic crisis is an ethical question, centred around a misunderstanding of the nature of the human person, hence a misunderstanding of the family and society as a whole.

4.8. Therefore, we call on the Church in Europe to respond to the demographic crisis. Priority should be given to new strategies for the pastoral care of the family which would break the destructive cycle of conforming to a negative mentality, closed to God's gift of new life within the commitment of marriage.

4.9. In this context, the modern methods for the natural regulation of fertility must be promoted- in order to free married couples from the contraceptive and anti-life mentality. When used for just reasons, these methods can help lead married people to a truly responsible fatherhood and motherhood.

4.10. The struggle against abortion and euthanasia takes on an urgent meaning in the context of the "demographic winter". As Pope

John Paul n said: "A people which kills its own children is a people without a future" (*Angelus Message*, 1 September 1996). Until every unborn child and aged, seriously ill or disabled person is respected as having inherent rights, what Pope John Paul U. describes as the "culture of death" will continue to menace the families and peoples of Europe.

4.11. The pastoral care of migrants requires a better understanding of their needs and problems, together with the defense of their rights and their welfare.

4.12. Finally, we call on the Church to promote wider awareness and open discussion of the European demographic crisis, its real causes and the impact it has on the family and its members.

4.13. There is a great need for dialogue on the demographic reality and demographic policies with governments, parliaments, with legislators, politicians and institutions. This dialogue should not only be on the situation in Europe but on Europe's influence in the world. A new awareness is beginning to emerge, but this process needs to be encouraged.

4.14. We thank the Episcopal Conferences and ecclesial organizations that are working in Europe to recover hope for the future as they promote faith in human life, which is the gift of the Lord of Life.

4.15. Speaking to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 8 October 1988, Pope John Paul n said: "There is a real danger of the family's destabilization and break-up. The declining demographic charts are a sign of a disturbing family crisis. In this situation Europeans must recapture and restore to the family its value as the first element of social life. May they be able to create conditions which favour its stability, which allow it to accept and give life generously!".

4.16. Therefore, notwithstanding the difficult situation, it is our hope that, as the future of Europe passes through the family, so the sterile pessimism of the "demographic winter" can gradually be transformed into a spring of growth, confidence and hope.

Chiara Lubich: Founder of the Focolare Movement

Dr. Chiara Lubich, founder and president of the Work of Mary or Focolare Movement, was born on January 22, 1920 in Trent, Italy. At the age of 23, she consecrated herself to God. Soon many people from all walks of life joined her in living and spreading mutual love as proposed by the Gospel. Ever since, a new spiritual doctrine was born, founded on unity and the mystery of the abandonment of Jesus.

With the collaboration of the late German Bishop and renowned theologian, Msgr. Klaus Hemmerle, she has established at the International Center of the movement a study group, which she directs and animates, for the theological deepening of the doctrine born from the life of the movement and its spirituality.

The culture of unity permeates Christian communities and is shared by 49,000 members of the Evangelical, Reformed, Orthodox and Anglican Churches, as well as other churches and ecclesial communities. It also promotes a fruitful dialogue with other religions such as Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Animists, etc. that number around 29,000. More than 70,000 persons from other convictions collaborate with the movement towards the realization of a united world.

Since 1960, the core members of the Focolare receive their theological formation at the "Istituto Mystici Corporis" of Loppiano (Italy) and Montet (Switzerland). In 1980, she founded the Marian Popular University for the formation of the members of the Movement.

Subsequently, she initiated schools on ecumenism in Rome, London, Germany, Switzerland, Lebanon, Brazil, Argentina, USA and the Philippines; on social doctrine of the Church in Rome, Brazil and Argentina; on dialogue with Oriental Religions in the Philippines, with Judaism in USA and with Islam in Turkey; on dialogue with contemporary cultures in Rome and on inculturation in Nairobi (Kenya).

In 1985, she was appointed as a "Consultor" of the Pontifical Council of the Laity. In the same year, she participated as "Auditor" at the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, and in 1987 at the Synod on the "Vocation and Mission of the Laity in the Church and in the World", wherein she presented to the Plenary Assembly a talk on the "Spirituality of the Laity and of Movements".

In May 1991, during her visit to Brazil, Dr. Lubich launched a project of an "economy of communion", which upholds the equal distribution of goods through communion among individuals, as well as the creation of businesses which give a part of their profits to those in need. Its aim is to bring about a new economic order in the world which is based on a "culture of giving" rather than on "having".

Dr. Lubich has received important recognitions from various religious, ecumenical and cultural organizations such as the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion (London, 1977); Cross of the Order of St. Augustine of Canterbury (1981); Byzantine Cross (Istanbul, 1984 and 1995); Casentino Prize (Stia-Italy, 1987); Peace of Augsburg Ecumenical Prize (Germany, 1988); First International Prize on the "Dialogue among Peoples" (Massa-Italy, 1993); Gold Medal of St. Vigilius (Trent-Italy, 1995); Gold Plaque and UELCI Author of the Year (Milan-Italy, 1995); Civilization of Love Prize (Reiti-Italy, 1996); Doctoral Degree "Honoris Causa" in Social Sciences (Lublin-Poland, 1996); UNESCO Peace Education Prize (Paris, 1996). In 1994 she was elected Honorary President for Life to the World Conference on Religion and Peace (Riva del Garda-Italy, 1994). In the civil field, she was awarded the Honorary Citizenship in Rocca di Papa (Italy, 1995) and in Pompeii (Italy, 1996).

A prolific writer, Dr. Lubich has authored more than 34 books on doctrine and spiritual life translated into 21 languages with around 3 million printed copies.

Today the Focolare Movement has spread to 200 nations in all the continents, with 101,000 members and over 2 million collaborators and sympathizers belonging to the most diverse categories, ages and cultures. Another 2 million supports the Movement through their personal witnessing and through mass media. It has 27 publishing houses, 40 formation centers and 18 international "little cities" of Christian and social witnesses.

Her doctrine is now widely accepted as a source of theological knowledge, highlighting the interdependence of theology and sanctity. Most significantly, it has given birth to a new spirituality in the Church, specifically a communitarian or collective spirituality.

(The University of Santo Tomas confer a degree of Doctor of Theology, honoris causa, upon Ms. Chiara Lubich last January 14, 1997).

Conferment of Doctor Honoris Causa To Signorina Chiara Lubich Founder and President of The Focolore Movement (On January 14, 1997, at 4:00 pm.)

BRAULIO PENA, OP

Your Eminence, Jaime Cardinal Sin; Very Rev. Fr. Quirico Pedregosa, Vice-Grand-Chancellor of the University of Santo Tomas; Very Rev. Fr. Rolando De La Rosa, Rector of the University of Santo Tomas; Rev. Fr. Rodel Aligan, Secretary General of the University; Professor Rodolfo Clavio, Registrar of USP, Distinguished Guests; Faculty Members; Ladies and Gentlemen: A pleasant good afternoon!

Signorina Chiara Lubich: BUONA SERA E BIENVENUTA A QUESTA UNIVERSITA DI SAN TOMASSO!

1. First a confession! When I was first informed that there was a pending request to grant Signorina Chiara Lubich a Doctor Honoris Causa in Sacred Theology, I wondered aloud, who is Chiara Lubich, and who are the Focolarini?

Well, one hears about them, but one could hardly affirm that they are in the headlines of either secular or ecclesiastical events, like some others do. So, I shrugged my shoulders and said, well, another one of those "lutong makao" titles ("Lutong makao", signorina Chiara, is a Tagalog expression that means, "you are a bella signorina").

2. Then a reversal. Striving for a spirit of intellectual fairness, I said to myself, since as Dean of the Faculty of Sacred Theology, I

will have to write the address of petition, I may as well learn more about her, about her work and about her followers.

1) The most difficult part was to find about her followers. Not that they are secretive, but rather that they don't go around boasting about their affiliation. Yet, if one is a keen observer, one may come to find about them. For they are actually all over the place. The trick to identify them? Simple. When you approach somebody in the campus and they greet you with a smile, when he or she attends to you smiling, and when she or he bids goodbye to you with a smile, a smile that does not link lips and two ears to show the teeth, but the smile that shines through the eyes, then, you have there a follower of Chiara. It is the secret of their smile.

2) Her work? "By the fruits you would recognize the tree", so said no other than Jesus himself. Well, my friends, the fruits of Chiara's work are there for all to see and appreciate: the Focolare Movement spread in over 200 nations throughout the five continents of the earth (soon they expect to land some Focolarini in the Moon and on Mars). Over 100,000 members and more than 2 million collaborators and sympathizers engaged in all toils of human enterprises particularly through mass media, formation centers and 18 international Cittadelle Mariane.

3) Her Person: Scanning through the biodata of Chiara Lubich is a source of admiration and joy. Chiara Lubich is born in Trent, Italy, on January 22, 1920. Since single women never age beyond 20, we can simply say that Chiara is nearing her 20 years for the fourth time. Her name, like biblical names, mark who the person is: Chiara, Clare, Clear, Transparent? And Lubich, from my very limited knowledge of etymological terms, a Slovak word for Love. Chiara Lubich, Transparent Love?

(1) As a woman, in an age of very outspoken feminism, I would dare to compare her to a trio of very outstanding women in the Church. One of them, Mother Teresa still alive, and two of them, Teresa de Avila and Catherine of Siena, already shining as theologians of the Church.

(2) As a theologian. Well, we have doctors in the Church specialized in all the various fields of theology. Doctors of Scriptures, doctors of Dogmatic theology, doctors of Morals, doctors in Pastoral theology, even doctors in History of the Church, etc. What is the specialty of Chiara that would make her deserve the title of Doctor in Sacred Theology?

We are told that she has authored more than 34 books on doctrine and spiritual life translated into 21 languages with around 3 million printed copies. Are those blotted figures? Three million copies is a very respectable number when any author would be satisfied knowing that his book is selling a few thousand copies. But then, just take into account that if each Folocarino sells just thirty copies you have already three million copies sold. And I am sure that out, not of commercial pragmatism, but out of sheer enthusiasm and love any Focolarino if requested would be more than willing to disposed of more than thirty copies.

What makes an author outstanding theologically, though, is not the number of copies sold, but the quality of the theology, of the message being conveyed.

From my readings of Chiara's books, three themes seem to prevail: Love, Unity and Mary. Three themes, indeed, very dear to any theologian. Love as the core of our religion, unity as the final wish (often forsaken) of our founder, and Mary as the focus of a Christian's heart. The quality and message of Chiara is there, in every page of every one of her books.

My favorites among her books: *A CALL TO LOVE, UNITY AND JESUS FORSAKEN, MARY HEART OF HUMANITY*. My friends, love is Chiara's name and theology. Unity is the target of her apostolate and Marv is the inspiration for her work.

Ladies and gentlemen, let it suffice to say that a woman of God so well qualified and so enthusiastically devoted to the spirit of the Gospel and to the ecclesial ministry is for all of us a model to emulate and a person to behold dearly in our hearts.

Chiara Lubich: For the prophetic movement she has founded, for the theology underlying that movement of the Christian life, for a spirituality being developed in life by members of the Focolare movement throughout the world, for her writings which have made a difference in the life of the Church in the contemporary world and which have inspired thousands of Christians throughout the world to dedicate their lives to Christian mission and ministry. For all these, Chiara Lubich richly deserves our recognition. On my part, to request the title of *Doctor Honoris Causa* from this University of Santo Tomas becomes then a honor and a source of ecclesial pride and solidarity.

As Dean of the Faculty of Sacred Theology of this Royal and Pontifical University of Santo Tomas, I do have the distinguished privilege to petition you, Very Reverend Father Rolando V. de la Rosa, Rector of said University, that given all the abundant merits of Chiara Lubich, the degree of Doctor of Sacred Theology, *Honoris Causa*, be conferred upon her.

THANK YOU!

Chiara Lubich: One from the Hearth

ROLANDO DE LA ROSA, OP

I hope the last word of the title caught your attention. It is not "heart" but "hearth", for Chiara is the founder of a movement called *Focolare*, an Italian word which means hearth or fireside.

During my first year as a seminarian, I learned that the specific charism of the Dominican order is summed up in one word: VERITAS (truth). My young mind excitedly conjured up the image of a lighthouse to symbolize every Dominican. At night, the lighthouse emits powerful light to guide errant ships back to the shore or to the right direction. I imagined every Dominican as a guide of souls lost in the darkness of ignorance and falsehood. Furthermore, a lighthouse is a bulwark of strength, a symbol of indestructibility.

I excitedly shared this imagery to my professor, hoping that he would laud me for what I thought was an original insight. But he merely looked at me with eyes that seemed to say "Are you crazy?" "A lighthouse is fine," he said, "but would anyone venture to come near it? Would anyone even want to stay in a lighthouse? The lighthouse, despite the guiding light, is cold, unwelcoming, forbidding." My professor explained that some people are turned off by us Dominicans precisely because we often project ourselves more like lighthouses than human beings.

He suggested that I meditate on another image. "If you want to be a Dominican," he said, "aim not to be a lighthouse. Be a hearth. The hearth is cozy, welcoming, comforting. It does not only emit light, it gives warmth." Indeed, the hearth has a heart.

Before the age of the cooking gas range, television and supermalls, families used to gather around the hearth at night, enjoying each other's presence and silence. A picture of a happy family was one showing them gathered at evenings around the fireside: father on his rocking chair, mother listening to or sharing stories of the day, grandmother knitting, the child on the floor reading his books, one hand stroking a sleepy dog or cat. Those were the days when children, sent to the cities to study, would describe loneliness as "missing the comfort of the hearth".

Today, loneliness is memorizing the television schedule by heart. The disappearance of the hearth in every home is symptomatic of the disintegration of the contemporary family.

During the Second World War when homeless Italian families were herded into a freezing, dark, crowded shelter, Chiara saw how useful the hearth was. Around the fireside would sit groups of families, praying, sharing their fears and their hopes. Above all, they experienced how, despite the hatred of those who bombed their houses, their love for each other kept them from being transformed into bitter, angry, vengeful people. The fireside was a focal point of unity.

The war was a good teacher. Chiara realized through her experience that brotherhood among people was not enough. There can be no fraternity of people unless they recognized a common paternity. For, how can we call each other brother or sister, if we do not recognize ONE father? The unity of mankind can only be realized if we return to God who is the source and ground of our being. Chiara's insight was incisive: the real wars are fought, not in the streets or battlefields but in the hearts of prodigal men and women who nurture the illusion that they are born to be alone, with no one to love them. The *Focolare* was a concrete expression of Christ's promise to his disciples: "I shall not leave you orphans"; and of God's vow to his people beautifully written by Isaiah: "even if your mother forgets you, I shall never forget you. See, I have written your name in the palm of my hand."

From the hearth, from her experience that love conquers all, Chiara developed further two concepts pervasive of the movement: Newness and Holiness. Every *focolarini* who wants to become an instrument of unity should aspire to holiness and newness of life in the particular situation where he finds himself. In a way, newness and holiness are

the same things. For, a saint is a person who has experienced the new, by himself being transformed, and made whole.

You have perhaps heard of someone telling you: "O my dear friend, you are a saint!" But the statement is said in such a way that removes you from the world of the living. Our Tagalog version goes like this: "*Ang banal mo, at napakabait; sana kunin kanang Diyos.*" (You are so holy and kind, that I hope God would take you away soon). Sanctity appears to be something out of this world, or a quality of the dear departed.

In our world where the saint is placed on altars and prayed to, but seldom loved, Chiara Lubich offers a down-to-earth version of holiness.

If we read through the biography of Chiara, we enter a new world where frail humanity is face to face with grace, the ordinary fuses with the extraordinary, the visible mingles closely with the invisible and so much love and peace flow out of the pages that our feat of sanctity recedes, and instead comes the nagging challenge: "why not I?"

Indeed, the presence of the whole person, a holy person like Chiara Lubich makes us ask that question buried under tons of neglect, fear, indifference, and anxiety: "why not I?" Or, better yet, "Why can't I?" Why can I not take seriously the demands of my faith? I believe it is not because we don't know God enough. The honest answer is: We don't love Him enough.

St. Thomas Aquinas beautifully puts it: "We become what we love". If very few of us have become God-like, despite the theologies we have learned, the sacraments imbibed, and the masses we have heard, it must be because despite our protestations to the contrary, we have not really loved God and our neighbor enough. I hope Chiara Lubich's presence in our midst would remind us of that adventure to holiness, to newness, to becoming God's living hearth in our homes, schools, offices, in every place where we find ourselves.

(Note: This article was published in the January 14, 1997 issue of the Manila Bulletin, page 11.)

A New Approach to Theology

*(Address for the Doctorate in Sacred Theology,
Honoris Causa)*

CHIARA LUBICH

Most Rev. Fr. Rolando V. De La Rosa, Rector Magnificus,
Your Excellency, Gian Vincenzo Moreni, Apostolic Nuncio,
Your Eminence, Jaime Cardinal Sin,
Rev. Fr. Rodel Aligan, Secretary General,
Rev. Fr. Maximo Marina, Vice Secretary General,
Mr. Rodolfo Clavio, Registrar

This day has arrived on which you wished, in your goodness, to confer upon me a doctorate in Sacred Theology.

Although amazed and still incredulous, I would like to express my heartfelt and profound gratitude.

Does theology have anything to do with me personally, with the task I am carrying out at the service of the Church?

Ladies and Gentlemen, you will be able to draw your own conclusions if you will kindly listen to something of my simple story.

I will begin simply by narrating about my youth, when my ideal was studies, especially philosophy. Searching for the truth with ancient and modern philosophers was what fully satisfied my mind and my heart.

But, having received a Christian education and moved, perhaps, by an impulse of the Spirit, I realized quite soon that it was, above all, ~~One~~ profound concern that stirred my interest: to know God.

I was convinced, therefore, that attending a Catholic university would have satisfied this longing of mine.

However, since it was not possible for me to begin such studies due to the uncertain economic situation of my family, I took an exam for a scholarship which was being offered to a limited number of students in Italy.

But great was my disappointment when I learned that I was not among those chosen. Brokenhearted, I shed all my tears.

While my mother was trying to console me, something rather unusual happened. In the depths of my soul, a subtle voice seemed to say: "I will be your teacher!" I immediately felt at peace again.

I was practicing Catholic and received Holy Communion daily.

Then one day, I had a new understanding. "How come," I asked myself, "that you are searching for the truth? Isn't there someone who said that He Himself is the truth in person? Didn't Jesus say of Himself: •I am the truth'?"

This, then, was one of the first reasons that prompted me to search for the truth not so much in books, but in Jesus.

And I decided to follow Him.

Meanwhile - this was in 1943 - Providence had brought the first seeds to bloom of what would later develop into the Focolare Movement.

I had continued my studies at the state university, but due to the increasing demands of the newly-born Movement, I had to put it aside and take it up again as many as fourteen times. Until one day, I put my beloved books in the attic once and for all.

One book, however, remained: the Gospel.

In the midst of the raging war, my friends and I brought it with us to the air-raid shelters, where we read it. We were surprised to find that those words, heard so many times in the past, acquired deep meaning, unusual splendor; they shone out as if there were a light beneath them all. They were different from all other words, even from those which can be found in the best spiritual books. They were universal words, therefore suited to everyone (young people, adults, men, women, Italians, Koreans, Ecuadoreans, Nigerians). They were eternal words, for every epoch, therefore, also for ours. And they could be put into practice. Indeed, inscribed with divine forcefulness, they pressed people, as it were, to translate into life.

While all the Gospel attracted us, to the point of considering it to be the rule of the newly-born Movement, that light (today we can say, that charism) led us to underline and to make our own especially the words which would constitute the foundation of a new spirituality in the Church: the spirituality of unity.

Before listing them, however, I would like to point out two singular episodes from those earliest days.

The first is this. One day as we first focolarine met in a cellar in order to shelter ourselves from the dangers of the war, we happened to open the Gospel to Jesus' solemn prayer to the Father (John 17).

"Father", we began reading, and we had the impression that we could somehow penetrate the meaning of that passage which was humanly speaking beyond our grasp; above all, we felt certain that we were born for that page of the Gospel. It would be the *magna carta* of the new Movement.

The second episode. Due to a particular circumstance, God had focused our attention on a specific aspect of the mystery of the cross: on the abandonment of Jesus.

As affirmed by mystics and theologians, that was His interior passion, the apex of His sufferings, the drama of a God who cries out: "My God, why have you forsaken me?"¹

In our youthful generosity, we decided to follow Him for the rest of our lives.

Coming back now to the main ideas taken from the Gospel as foundation stones, they were:

- God, the new ideal of our life who manifested Himself in the midst of the horrors of the war, fruit of hatred, for what He truly was: Love;
- doing the will of God and living His word as our possibility to respond to His love with our love;
- love of neighbor, especially the needy, as the commandment which sums up all the law;

'Mk 15:34; Mt 27:46.

- radically fulfilling Jesus' characteristic new commandment;
- taking upon ourselves the cross, every personal cross, that of our neighbors, and that present in the Church or in humanity;
- accomplishing unity with Jesus and with our neighbors, as understood in His prayer for unity;
- living with the presence of Jesus among us, promised to those who are united in His name and that is, in His love.

Besides these points, also:

- nourishing ourselves daily with the Eucharist, which is the bond of unity;
- living the Church, especially as "communion";
- imitating Mary, "Mother of unity", in her desolation;
- allowing ourselves to be guided individually and collectively by the Holy Spirit, Love-Person in the Trinity and bond of unity also among the members of the Body of Christ.

This brought about in the Church, perhaps for the first time, a spirituality that is more communitarian than individual, which allowed not only individuals to reach perfection, but a number of people, indeed, the people.

And it was a form of sanctity - as we are discovering - surprisingly attuned to our times.

"The figure of the saint will always be greatly honored..., said Paul VI, when he was still a Cardinal, but today, the Church tends towards a sanctity of the people."²

And John Paul II recently affirmed, in speaking to Bishops, friends of the Movement, that a spirituality which is both personal and communitarian together, is a 'constitutive' element of Christian life and therefore, also for Bishops."³

The Archbishop of Trent in northern Italy, the birthplace of the Movement, blessed it, discerning the hand of God in this new phenomenon of his diocese.

KJ.B. Card. MONTINI, *Discorsi sulla Madonna e sui Santi* (1955-1962), Milan, 1965, p. 499-500.

*Ci. JOHN PAUL II, Audience of February 16, 1995, to a group of Bishops, friends of the Focolare Movement.

Not everything, of course, was easy. The Gospel causes **love but** also hatred, and God's enemy too, does not just sit back and **let the** Gospel bear its fruits. However, with the blessing of the local Church and then of the universal Church, everything went ahead and developed. With the passing of years, a vast Movement was born and has spread all over the world, with millions of adherents. Well-ordered by the Spirit, the whole forms a Movement which, alongside others of our times, attests to the fact that the advent of a new springtime in the Church and in the world, foreseen by Popes, is not a Utopia.

Always aware and convinced that what is born in the Church must be in full communion with the Magisterium and Tradition of the Church, a couple of decades after the Movement's birth, towards the seventies, we wished to compare the main points of our spirituality, as they were understood and lived, with what had been said by the Fathers of the Church, the Councils, saints, Popes, and great theologians.

We joyfully discovered a marvelous consonance which confirmed that we were one with our Mother, the Church, although in our own specific way of thinking and acting.

This resulted in a deeper and more illuminated understanding of all her doctrine; an immersion in it which has helped to form each one of us more and more - we hope - as Church-souls.

In these recent years, we realized that from this life, from this personal and communitarian experience and the related asceticism and mysticism, a doctrine is taking shape, a doctrine which is always anchored in the eternal truth of Revelation but which develops and renews the theological tradition.

The presence in the Movement of a well known, profound and modern theologian of Germany, Bishop Klaus Hemmerle, now deceased, and of lay focal points men and women, as well as priests and religious who are professors or experts and who while living in the Movement have never completely abandoned their studies, but have enriched themselves year after year with true and profound culture illuminated by the charisma of unity, offered the occasion to open a kind of School that would study this doctrine: the so-called *Abba* School.

Furthermore, it was not the first time that something like this was happening in the Church.

Didn't the Spirit draw out a new doctrine from the experience of St. Francis, entrusting this task specifically to St. Bonaventure, to Blessed Duns Scotus, and so on? And isn't St Thomas Aquinas also the theologian of the order founded by St. Dominic, aside from being the "doctor communis"?

Thus, if it is lawful to compare oneself with such great realities, also for us (since it is not so much us but God who is at work), after almost fifty years of life, we saw the beginning of similar prospects.

We have studied and we continue to study. We study the experience we have lived throughout these years. We consider it in the light of Scripture and the great Tradition of the Church.

We also examine closely many intuitions or illuminations covering the vast range of our faith - intuitions which it seems the Spirit suggested to us, especially in 1949, a time not very distant from the beginning of the Movement.

But what are the principal cornerstones of the theology that is emerging from the charism of unity? I would like to recall some of them here, although these certainly do not exhaust the lines of in-depth study and research that are being undertaken.

The principal cornerstones are God-Love, unity, Jesus crucified and forsaken, and Mary.

God-Love, first of all. What John Paul II said of the spirituality given to us by God holds true for our theology as well, namely, that its first inspiring spark was love.⁴

Clearly, it is not just any kind of love, but agape, the love of God, the Love that is God. The starting point of our experience and of the theology that emerges from it is therefore the same as that of Christian faith itself: "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love".⁵

The originality of Christian revelation, which discloses the unprecedented depths of God's self-revelation in the Old Testament: "I am

⁴Visit of John Paul II to the international headquarters at Rocca di Papa, on August 19, 1984; cf. *"Citta Nuova"*, n 17, 1984.

⁵ 1 John 4:16.

who am"⁶, at the same time bringing to unexpected fruition the seeds of the Word dispersed in the various religions, is contained in this New Testament confession of faith: "God is Love".

Love is not only an attribute of God, but it is His very Being. And because He is Love, God is One and Triune at the same time: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Jesus, above all in the paschal event of His passion, driven to the point of the annihilation of the abandonment and death, which leads to the resurrection and the effusion of the Spirit, reveals to us the Being of the Trinity as Love.

The Father generates the Son out of love, He is "lost" in the Son, He lives in Him; in a certain sense He makes Himself "non-being" out of love and for this very reason, He is, He is the Father. The Son, as echo of the Father, returns out of love to the Father, He is "lost" in the Father, He lives in Him, in a certain sense He makes Himself "non-being" out of love and for this very reason, He is, He is the Son. The Holy Spirit, who is the mutual love between the Father and the Son, their bond of unity, in a certain sense also makes Himself "non-being" out of love, and for this very reason, He is, He is the Holy Spirit

Closely linked to this first cornerstone is the second: unity.

As I have already said, from the very beginning of the Movement, we were overpowered by the words of Jesus' prayer of unity: "As you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, that the world may believe that you sent me".⁷

Seeking to put these words into practice, we discovered a light pouring out from them which illuminated God's design of love for humanity.

In fact, Jesus - we understood - is the Word of God made man in order to teach men and women to live according to the model of the life of the Trinity, that life which He lives in the bosom of the Father.

He did not stop at pointing out and linking closely to one another the two central commandments of the Old Testament: "You shall love the Lord, your god, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with

«Cf. Exodus 3:14.

⁷John 17:21.

all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself"/ But He also taught us the commandment which He Himself does not hesitate to describe as "His commandment" and "new", with which we can live the Trinitarian life on earth: "As I have loved you, so you also should love one another".⁹

The commandment of mutual love lived out and measured upon Jesus' love for us, to the point of the abandonment which consumes us in one in Him, describes - as underlined also by the Second Vatican Council¹⁰ - the heart of Christian anthropology, the vision of the human person revealed to us by Jesus.

Thus, when we live the new commandment seeking to receive the gift of unity in Jesus, which comes to us from the Father, the life of the Trinity is no longer lived only in the interior life of the individual person, but it flows freely among the members of the Mystical Body of Christ

Thus the Mystical Body of Christ can become in fullness what it is through the grace of faith and the sacraments, especially through the Eucharist: the presence of the risen Christ in history, who relives in each one of His disciples and in their midst¹¹

And now the third cornerstone: Jesus crucified and forsaken.

The Holy Spirit Himself, we believe, even before making us penetrate the mystery of unity, focused our faith and our exclusive love on Jesus who, as I have already mentioned, in a climax of love and suffering, cries out from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"¹²

It is the moment in which He experiences the deepest separation that can ever be imagined: in a certain sense He experiences being separated from His Father with whom He is and remains one. This is the way He gives to all men and women a new and fuller unity than the one they had lost through sin: He gives them unity with God and among themselves as a participation in His unity with the Father and

•Cf. Matthew 22: 37-39.

»Cf. John 13:34; 15:12.

¹⁰Cf. *Gaudium et spes*, 22, 24.

"Cf. Matthew 18:20.

"Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46.

with us. He is therefore the key to the comprehension and actualization of unity.

In order to achieve unity, it is necessary, in fact, to remember and to love Jesus forsaken (this is the name we immediately gave to Jesus in this central and all inclusive mystery of His redeeming mission); it is necessary to love Him in a radical way, like St. Paul, who affirmed: "I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified".

Furthermore, in His abandonment, Jesus made Himself - as Scripture says - "sin",¹⁴ "cursed"¹⁵ in order to make Himself one with those who were far from God.

For this reason, Jesus forsaken really seems to be the God of our times: a divine answer to the abyss of trial and suffering deeply cut in the human heart by the atheism which pervades so much of modern culture; by the poverty of millions of underprivileged; and by the quest for meaning and ideals on the part of the disillusioned and confused new generations.

Jesus forsaken is the God of today also because He is the image of the division that exists between the Churches, a division we are more conscious of in our times.

Discovering His countenance in these divisions is precisely what gives us hope to be able to cooperate in a vital way towards reunification.

In particular, we seem to understand that in Him "who was God and emptied Himself" - as Paul writes in the letter to the Philippians, (cf. 2:6-7) - a providential way is opening for dialogue with the religious traditions of the East, and this represents one of the most committing and urgent frontiers at the dawning of the third millennium.

Finally, Mary. We feel that she cannot be merely a theme among others of our theology, important as they may be.

Perhaps because ours is her Work, the Work of Mary. Perhaps

¹³ ICorinthians 2:2.

¹⁴Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21.

"Cf. Galatians 3:13.

because today many signs of the times and authoritative words of the magisterium speak to us of the emerging "Marian profile" of the Church. Perhaps because we witness the singular phenomenon of the figure of Mary being recognized by other religious faiths, we can see the heralding of a new and original season of mariological reflection.

In it, we believe, the reality of Mary should be explored in the context of God's global design of salvation for all humanity and for the cosmos.

Mary, in fact, as John Paul II said recently is "an integral part in the economy of communicating the Trinity to the human race".¹⁷

She is the Mother of the Word of God made man, which places her in an extraordinary and unique relationship with all of the Most Holy Trinity."

This, above all, is the real greatness of Mary, which "magnifies" the greatness of God and His works.

But Mary is also Mother of the Church. As she generated the Son of God in the flesh through the work of the Holy Spirit, similarly, having shared in a unique way in the Redemption through her desolation at the foot of the cross,¹⁸ she participates efficaciously in the regeneration of the sons of God brought about by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Church.

Mary, now in heaven, in God's design for her completely fulfilled, is the flower and first fruit of the Church and creation, which in her is already Christified, divinized. We can think of her, in a certain way, as being set, through grace, in the Trinity, as icon and expression of the whole creation.

In fact because there subsists in God a perfect perichoresis between the three divine Persons, and because, through Christ, in the Spirit, there is also a perichoresis between the Trinity and humanity, apex and synthesis of creation: "You loved them even as you loved me"¹⁹ - also all creation, recapitulated in Christ, is destined to be, as Mary already is, and in Her, eternally set in the Trinity: that is, to live and rejoice

•JOHN PAUL II, Mary's relationship with the Trinity, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, Weekly Edition in English, N. 3, 17 January 1996, p. 11.

"Cf. Luke 1:35.

"Cf. John 19:25-27.

»Cf. John 17:23.

infinitely in the intimate life of God, in the ever new and unending dynamism of the trinitarian relationships.

As I hope can be understood from what I have said, the doctrine which springs forth from this charism of unity, gives the impression of having a glimpse into the center of Revelation.

Our theologians, in fact, quoting von Balthasar, recall that: "Charisms like those of St. Augustine, St. Francis, St. Ignatius can receive, given by the Spirit, *glimpses into the center of revelation*, glimpses which enrich the Church in a very unexpected and yet everlasting way. They are always," continues the great theologian, "charisms in which intelligence, love and discipleship are inseparable. This shows that the Spirit is at once divine wisdom and divine love, and in no case pure theory, but always living practice."²⁰

First of all, our theologians point out that the people who deepen their understanding of this doctrine can in a special way participate in Him, or, as Augustine says,²¹ be made one with Him - perhaps because by constantly seeking to live in accordance with this charism of unity, they remain united in the name of Jesus, so that He is present among them, and because they are nourished daily with Jesus in the Eucharist

Therefore, a novelty which seems to emerge from the charism lived in this way is that the theology which results here is not only a theology about Jesus, but a theology of Jesus: of Jesus present in and among theologians.

They observe, in fact, that the predominant line followed in Christian reflection has been that of looking to Jesus above all as the Object of theology. Obviously, there was always the awareness that such an Object - the Son of God made man - required an adequate knowing subject, that is, reason illuminated by faith, a Christified reason.

Nonetheless, theology in the West, especially in the recent past, has been generally more of a reflection on God and on Jesus, with the exception, we believe, of the theology elaborated by theologians who were also charismatics and often saints (for example, limiting ourselves to the Western tradition, theologians like St. Anselm of Aosta, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Bonaventure, and even earlier,

²⁰*Teologica*, m, Jaca Book, Milan, 1992, p. 22.

²¹AUGUSTINE, In Jo. Ev., tract 21:8-9: PL 35. 1568-1569.

the Fathers of the Church obviously, from the East and the West). Generally, it was a knowledge almost "from without", rather than from within the mystery being considered through participating, in faith and love, in the knowledge that Jesus has of the Father. "No one knows the Son," said Jesus, "except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him".²²

And this is a knowledge which Jesus gives, through His Spirit, to His Mystical Body, and which is fully received when we are "one" in Him,²³ almost one "*mystica persona*".²⁴*

Thus, through this charism of unity, the necessary condition is present for the rebirth of a great theology of Jesus: clearly, not the Jesus of 2000 years ago, but the Jesus who lives today in the Church.

This leads to a second innovation. Since this theology is the theology of *Jesus who ascended into the bosom of the Father*, who lives today in the unity which is the Church, it would be characterized by a point of unity, of One, that is, of God, in whom everything is in its true reality.

Therefore, it would be "one" perspective, next to others, which would not exclude the others; on the contrary, it would presuppose and give value to the others: but at the same time it would be able to offer a unique contribution that would be capable of harmonizing the others, because it would lead them to unity, illuminating them in a new horizon;

Furthermore, since in a certain sense, as we already mentioned, it is a theology of Jesus, in whom all created realities are recapitulated, it would shed light also on the various sciences, making them true more authentic. Indeed, we can dream that theology would return to being the mother of the other sciences and - why not? - even the queen, although in a different sense from that intended in the Middle Ages, not destroying their legitimate autonomy but leading them once again to their true root and their true end.

Rector Magnificus, Your Eminences, Your Excellencies, Reverend Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen, this Doctorate has been conferred upon me because of the theology of the Focolare Movement. So I have sought to spend some time on this subject I hope it has been helpful.

Thank you once again.

^BMatthew 11:27.

^ACf. Galatians 3:28.

^MST. THOMAS AQUINAS. De ver. 29, 7 ad 11.

CONSULTATIVE WORDS

Cases and Inquiries

EXCELSO GARCIA, OP

FACULTY TO HEAR CONFESSIONS

I have read the case entitled APPOINTMENT OF A HOSPITAL CHAPLAIN, published in 1995. I must confess that I was also of the opinion that the Chaplain of a Hospital could hear confessions not only in the Hospital but also in the parish church, in other churches of the diocese and in the whole world. It seems, however, that I was wrong. To tell you the truth, the topic of the jurisdiction necessary to hear confessions has always been for me a very difficult question in the Church's legislation. In our priestly meetings I have perceived that other priests have no clear idea either about the need of this jurisdiction. Some believe that to be a priest is enough to exercise the pastoral ministry in the confessional. "After all, the Church supplies for all our deficiencies", they say.

I think that a study on the jurisdiction required to hear confessions and problems related to it, could be very helpful to correct possible errors on this important matter.

A Parish Priest

I agree with the consultant. There are some priests who have no accurate idea on the jurisdiction required by the Church in order to hear confessions. Some take for granted the need to ask this faculty from the competent authority while others consider such faculty as a privilege,

which can be interpreted and used as the person who enjoys the faculty wants. In order to correct such anomalies and misconceptions, we are willing to summarize the main problems related to this topic and give the following explanations.

Two things necessary in the minister

"Only a priest is the minister of the Sacrament of Penance", canon 965 states. And canon 966 adds: "For the valid absolution of sins, it is required that, in addition to the power of the Order, the minister has the faculty to exercise that power in respect of the faithful to whom he gives absolution".

Two different things, therefore, are absolutely necessary in the minister of the Sacrament of Penance to validly absolve any penitent from his/her sins, namely, the power of Order and the faculty to exercise such priestly power.

The power of Order is given only through a valid ordination. This power is so necessary for a valid absolution, that no remission of sins is effected, if the person who absolves the penitent is not a priest. In this regard no consideration should be given to the fact whether the absolution to a well disposed penitent be given in good or bad faith, even in danger of death. The absolution given by a person who has not received the power of Order is always invalid. Hence canon 965 reads: "Only a priest is the minister of the Sacrament of Penance." This does not mean, however, that a penitent well disposed, who receives an invalid absolution, be deprived of God's mercy. God will surely bless his good disposition, but not by virtue of the invalid absolution.

In order to hear confessions validly, the priest, after having been ordained, needs also to enjoy the faculty to use the power he has received. "For the valid absolution of sins it is required that, in addition to the power of Order, the minister has the faculty to exercise that power in respect to the faithful to whom he gives absolution" (can. 966).

Concession of **the** faculty by the law itself

The faculty to use the power of Order or *jurisdiction* necessary to hear confessions, as it is commonly called, is given to the priest in

two different ways, namely: a) by the law itself, b) by concession granted by the competent authority.

A clear concession by the law itself is the one granted in canon 976, which establishes: "Any priest, even though he lacks the faculty to hear confessions, can validly and lawfully absolve any penitents who are in danger of death, from any censures and sins, even if an approved priest is present". No qualification is required in the priest to whom is granted by this law the faculty to absolve the persons who are in danger of death. Existing the danger of death caused by whatever reason such as serious illness, old age, a difficult delivery, the participation in a battle, etc., is a sufficient reason for any priest to absolve validly those whose life is in danger.

Canon 968,1 enumerates some persons who, by reason of the office they hold, are granted also by law the faculty to absolve validly the sins in confession. It reads as follows: "By virtue of his office, for each within the limits of his territorial jurisdiction, the faculty to hear confessions belongs to the local Ordinary, to the canon Penitentiary, to the parish Priest, and others who are in the place of the parish Priest". "Where there is no chapter of canons, the diocesan Bishop is to appoint a priest to fulfill the office of canon Penitentiary" (c.508). Notice that these persons mentioned in the foregoing canon 968, 1 are granted by law the jurisdiction to hear confessions within the limits of their territory, without any restriction with regards to the penitents: these can be their own subjects as well as foreigners.

Likewise, the law itself grants the faculty to hear confessions, though in a restricted manner,, to chaplains appointed by the local Ordinary. Canon 566 states: "A chaplain, appointed by the local Ordinary (can. 566), has by virtue of his office the faculty to hear the confessions of the faithful entrusted to his care ... In hospitals and prisons and on sea voyages, a chaplain has the further faculty, to be exercised only in those places, to absolve from *latae sententiae* censures which are neither reserved nor declared".

Finally, canon 968, 2 establishes: "The Superiors of religious institutes or of societies of apostolic life, if they are clerical and of pontifical right and have executive power according to their constitutions, have by virtue of their office the faculty to hear the confessions **of their**

own subjects and of those who live day and night in the house". The faculty, therefore, enjoyed by these Superiors is also restricted to **their subjects and those who live day and night in the house.**

Concession of the faculty by the competent authority.

The most common and ordinary way to obtain the necessary jurisdiction to hear confession is by way of concession granted by the competent authority.

Canon 969, 1 states: "Only the local Ordinary is competent to give to any priest whomsoever the faculty to hear confessions of any whomsoever of the faithful. Priests who are members of religious institutes should not, however, use this faculty without the permission, at least presumed, of their Superiors". The faculty, therefore, to hear the confessions of any faithful (belonging to the laity, to a religious institute, or to the clergy) is granted by the local Ordinary. Parish priests can not grant this faculty. Religious priests should not use this concession without their Superior's permission, at least presumed, in accordance with canon 678, 2.

Likewise, canon 969,2 reads: "The Superior of a religious institute or a society of apostolic life, mentioned in canon 968, 2 is competent to give to any priest whomsoever the faculty to hear the confessions **of his own subjects and of those others who live day and night in the house".**

The law requires from those who are competent to grant the faculty to hear confessions to submit the applicant priests to an examination or other means in order to show their suitability (c. 970); not to give the habitual faculty to those who belong to another diocese without consulting the applicant's own Ordinary (c. 971). The faculty habitually to hear confessions should be given in writing (c. 973).

Where can this faculty be used?

The 1917 Code established in canon 873, 1: "Besides the Roman Pontiff, the Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church enjoy ordinary jurisdiction to hear confessions in the Universal Church; the local Ordinary, the parish priest and those who substitute him enjoy ordinary jurisdiction too in their respective territory".

Canon 873, 2: "The Canon Penitentiary enjoys that jurisdiction as it is determined in can. 401,1 ... and the exempted religious Superiors enjoy that same jurisdiction in regards to their subjects according to their constitutions".

The new Code of 1983 has considerably changed the discipline of the old Code. Canon 967 states:

"1. Besides the Roman Pontiff, the Cardinals enjoy by the law itself the faculty to hear the confession of the faithful everywhere; likewise, the Bishops may exercise it everywhere, unless the diocesan Bishop be opposed to it in a particular case".

"2. Those who have the faculty habitually to hear confessions, whether by virtue of their office or by virtue of a concession granted by the Ordinary of either the place of their incardination or of their domicile, can exercise that faculty everywhere, unless in a particular case the local Ordinary refuses it".

"3. In respect to their members and of those others who live day and night in the house of an institute or society, this same faculty is, by virtue of the law itself, possessed everywhere by those who have the faculty to hear confessions, whether by virtue of their office or by virtue of a special concession of the competent Superior in accordance with cc. 968, 2 and 969. They may lawfully use this faculty, unless in a particular case a major superior has, in respect of his own subjects, refused".

This change done by the new Code implies two different things, namely: a) the Church has very much in mind the *solus animarum*, and b) the legislator shows full trust in the good discernment of local Ordinaries and Superiors in the conferment of certain offices and in their concession of the faculty to individual priests. Obviously, the extension of the faculty to hear confessions in the Universal Church is conditioned to the fact that the office, to which it is attached, is still held by the priest concerned, or the granted concession of the faculty has not yet expired. As explicitly stated in the law, due respect is given to the Ordinary of the place where the faculty is to be exercised. He can deny, for one reason or another, the extension of the faculty now granted by law, within his own territory.

Cessation of the faculty to hear confessions

We have already said that two different things are absolutely necessary in the minister of the Sacrament of Penance: the power of Order (priesthood) and the faculty to hear confessions (jurisdiction). The power of Order lasts for ever. A priest validly ordained cannot be deprived from his priestly power. Even if he would become a bad priest, his priesthood will always be with him.

The faculty, however, to hear confessions or jurisdiction, can cease in different ways.

Canon 975 establishes: "Apart from revocation, the faculty mentioned in canon 967, 2 ceases by loss of office, by excommunication or by loss of domicile". The faculty dealt with in canon 967, 2 and explained above is the faculty to hear confessions in the Universal Church, applicable only to "those who have the faculty habitually to hear confessions by virtue of their office, or by virtue of a concession by the Ordinary of the place of their incardination or of their domicile".

Three different groups of priests are distinguished in can. 967, 2 who according to the law can hear confessions in the Universal Church, namely: a) those who enjoy the faculty habitually to hear confessions by virtue of their office, as parish priests, hospital chaplains, Canon Penitentiary and priest appointed by the Bishop to fulfill this office; b) those who enjoy the faculty to hear confessions granted by the Ordinary of the place of their incardination and c) priests who are members of religious institutes or of societies of apostolic life and have domicile in the diocese of the Ordinary granting the faculty.

The three foregoing groups of priests lose the faculty to hear confessions in the Universal Church if: a) they lose the office to which the faculty to hear confessions was attached, or b) they have lost the faculty granted to them by the local Ordinary of their incardination, or c) they have lost the faculty to hear confessions granted by the Ordinary of the place of their domicile (can. 103).

It is logical that, having ceased the jurisdiction to hear confession in any of the three foregoing cases, there is no basis whatsoever to maintain its extension for the Universal Church.

Penalty

"A person who, not having the faculty to give the sacramental absolution, attempts to do so, or hears a sacramental confession, incurs a *latae sententiae* suspension. In such a case other penalties, not excluding excommunication, can be added, according to the gravity of the offense" (can. 1378, 2-3).

Jurisdiction **supplied** by **the** Church

It is perfectly understandable that the Church should punish those priests who, fully aware of their being deprived of the necessary faculty to hear confessions, dare to make the faithful believe that they are qualified ministers of God's mercy in the Sacrament of Penance. But what to say about the ordinary Christians who in good faith and well prepared approach the confessional to obtain God's mercy? Will they suffer and be deprived of God's grace, when they confess their sins to priests who cannot absolve them validly?

Canon 144 gives us the answer to these questions: "In common error and in positive and probable doubt, whether of law or of fact, the Church supplies the jurisdiction necessary, both in the external and internal forum". This principle applies to the faculty mentioned in canon 966, necessary in a priest to hear confessions. The Church supplies such faculty in the cases pointed out in canon 144. Let us explain therefore, what common error and positive and probable doubt mean.

Common error

Error is a wrong judgment on something. Error is said to be common when it affects all or a great number of the community members; otherwise it is particular or individual. Common error is twofold: in fact or in law. There is common error **in fact** when a good number of the locality or community members are mistaken about the jurisdiction to hear confessions in a priest. For instance, a parish priest tells his parishioners on a Sunday Mass that the retreat master to be coming next week will hear confessions of those who want to confess, not knowing that the priest lacks jurisdiction to hear confessions. There is a common error on the law when there exists a reason or cause which by itself induces all who know the same to be mistaken, although

in fact a few only are perhaps affected. For instance, a priest is in the confessional waiting for penitents, although he is aware of his lack of jurisdiction.

In such circumstances we should be guided by the following principles:

1) A priest who aware of being deprived of jurisdiction, induces the faithful to make their confession to him, absolves validly. The Church supplies jurisdiction, not in favor of the priest but for the sake of the faithful. The priest commits mortal sin and incurs a censure *latae sententiae* suspension, according to canon 1378, 2-3.

2) If common error in fact has been committed in good faith, as in the case when the parish priest announced to the congregation that the retreat master will be ready to hear confessions, the priest concerned may hear the confession of those who want to do so and absolve them validly and licitly. There are some authors, however, who say that, if the error could easily be corrected, it will be better to do so. This notwithstanding if there is any inconvenience or difficulty to do so on the part of the faithful or it will affect the good name of the retreat master, the common error in fact may be invoked and he can hear the confessions of the faithful licitly and validly.

3.) In case of grave necessity on the part of the faithful, as it happens on days of a great number of confessions, if the priest becomes conscious that his jurisdiction to hear confession has expired and it is not easy to make recourse to the competent authority, the priest concerned can make use of the common error and hear confession validly and licitly.

Positive and probably doubt

Positive doubt is the one which is based on some reasons, but not on ignorance. The doubt is probable when the reasons in favor of the jurisdiction are good and strong, although there might still be some doubts against it. The doubt is negative when it is not based on any reason; it cannot be invoked in favor of the jurisdiction supplied by the Church.

Positive doubt is twofold: about the law or about a fact. The former refers to the existence or interpretation of a law, as for instance whether a censure is reserved or not; the latter exists when it is doubtful whether the competent authority has granted the faculty or whether the given faculty has already expired.

In case of negative doubt sacramental absolution will be valid if the absolving priest has jurisdiction really; however it, will be invalid, if the priest lacks jurisdiction, in which case the Church does not supply it. No priest should hear confessions with negative doubt.

In case of positive and probable doubt, whether of the law or a fact, the priest hearing confessions validly and licitly absolves the sins confessed to him, since the Church supplies, when this kind of doubt is present.

Homiletic and Bibliarasal Pointers

May-June 1997

EFREN RIVERA, O.P.

May 4, 1997

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER, Cycle B

JOHN 15:9-17

THE FATHER: SOURCE OF ALL LOVE

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The Sixth Sunday of Easter is the Sunday before the Ascension of Christ. The Gospel Reading is a continuation of Christ's Farewell Discourse in John ch. 15.

LOVE is an overused and misused word. We must not let the world snatch it from us and equate it with sex. To understand what Christian Love is, it is important for us to gain three insights from today's gospel reading: (1) The source of any true love is God the Father. (2) Love is a two-way relationship and not a one-way street (3) Christian obedience is Christian love blended with faithfulness in fulfilling the mission entrusted by Christ.

Focus Points. (1) V. 9a. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you."

The Father is the source of all love. Even the love of Jesus for us is real only because the Father's love for him is real. If the Father does not love Jesus, Jesus will not love us.

(2) **V. 10a. "Live on in my love."** Love is like a fixed spotlight. It lights up persons when they move in. The same persons return to darkness if they step out of the light.

(3) **V. 10b. "You will live in my love if you keep the commandments."** Divine love never goes only one way, because it is a mutual relationship. Necessarily it flows from the Father to the Son and back. Similarly, Christ's love for us "dies" or loses its power when we do not love him in return. Once we understand this, we are ready for deeper insights. First, even when we respond to Jesus with love, this love might die if it is not supported by obedience. Secondly, Christian obedience is not a burden undertaken out of fear. It is a form of love. It is love coupled with mission.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. **A** man falls in love when he finds his ideal woman. Without an ideal leading us, what we call love is not love at all but mere physical attraction, something we can also see in birds and beasts. When we love someone, we must be able to say as Jesus did: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." We love a person with a Christian love when we see Christ, our ideal, in that person. We need not see our TOTAL ideal in the one we love. It is enough, for example, to see the suffering Christ in a poor man or to see the victorious Christ in someone who has overcome drug dependence.

1.1 Pointer for sharing: You are someone who loves. Have you ever asked yourself where your love comes from? Why not do this exercise right now, and share the results of your reflection with your small group?

2. We remain in the spotlight of Christ's love as long as we keep out of darkness. Darkness in the Gospel according to John is not just the absence of light. It is an evil, personal force, Satan. He is always trying to snatch people out of the light.

2.1 *Pointer for sharing.* Have you experienced Satan's efforts to take you away from Christ's light and love?

3. Our mission as Christians is well expressed in the words of the song of the 1996 World Youth Day, "Tell the world of His love." This is the mission to which we must be faithful. Obedience to Christ is the same as faithfulness to our missionary vocation.

3.1 *Pointer for sharing.* Are you, in your present situation, obeying Christ, that is, are you "telling the world of his love"?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* Jesus shares with us the love that his Father shows to him. In our turn, we have to share this love with others.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Jesus cares for us because he wants his joy to be ours too. We should also show this kind of caring to others. They, too, need joy in their lives.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* Jesus affirmed his disciples by calling them his FRIENDS (Jn 15:14-15).

4. *FORGIVENESS.* Jesus forgave the shortcomings of his disciples, as when he asked them to watch and pray with him at the garden of Gethsemane, and they slept instead. In spite of their mistakes and failures, he treated them as his friends.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* Divine Love is flowing like a river. It flows from the Father to Jesus, to us.

C. STORY: He Loved in Spite of Himself

Mr. Meyer was a German Christian who did not like Jews at all. He was always vocal in criticizing them.

Then came the Nazi persecution of the Jews. Hitler's troops herded Jews — men, women and children — to concentration camps. There the Nazis gassed the Jews to death. They killed at least 4 million, perhaps more than 6 million, Jews brutally and mercilessly.

Was Mr. Meyer happy about this fate of the Jews? Not at all. He said: "It is one thing to criticize the Jews and an entirely different thing to kill them just for being Jews."

Mr. Meyer, like a number of other Christians, risked the confiscation of their property and the death punishment imposed for treason to save Jews from the Nazis by smuggling them out of Germany.

Today, in recognition of their humanitarian service, they have their own monuments around the Jewish shrine of the Holocaust in Jerusalem.

Mr. Meyer's critical attitude towards the Jews came from his cultural conditioning as a human being. His humanitarian service towards them is a form of that love that comes from the heavenly Father.

May 11, 1997

ASCENSION OF THE LORD, Cycle B.

MARK 16:15-20

HE SITS AT GOD'S RIGHT HAND

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEPS 3

AMBASSADORS OF CHRIST AND FOR CHRIST. That's what the eleven disciples became when Jesus ascended to heaven.

Those who accept their message and believe in Jesus should show their faith externally by asking for baptism.

Faith and baptism, however, are not the only ways of accepting Jesus. More than these, the way to accept Jesus is to open to him the door of our hearts and let him come in to take charge of our lives. We accept him as he is right now, victorious and glorious, the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. As a result of accepting him in this way, we gain SALVATION here and now.

Focus Points. (1) V. 15b, "**Proclaim the good news to all creation.**" The one who proclaims is a HERALD, and in a sense an AMBASSADOR, as St. Paul said: "This makes us ambassadors **for** Christ, God as it were appealing through us," 2 Cor 5:20.

(2) V. 16, "**Those who believe in it and accept baptism will be saved; those who refuse to believe in it will be condemned.**" Let us notice the connection between FAITH BAPTISM SALVATION.

(3) V. 20b, "**The Lord continued to work with them throughout and confirm the message through the signs which accompanied them.**" Examples of the SIGNS are mentioned in V. 17-18: "**they will use my name to expel demons, they will speak entirely new languages, they will be able to handle serpents, they will be able to drink deadly poison without harm, and the sick upon whom they lay their hands will recover.**" Preaching and "signs" went hand in hand in early Christian times. There is no reason why they should not do so in our times, allowing, of course for adjustments on what signs might be appropriate.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN AND SHARE

1. The mission of the Apostles was "to all creation." Although this means, primarily, that people should be evangelized, it implies that the good news will also be good for the COSMOS, the physical world. It is through the care of Christians that the physical world, too, will be renewed. < Historically, the original Apostles were not able to preach the message to "all creation." It is the Church, growing through time and space, that has to carry on their mission.

1.1 Pointer for sharing. Are you continuing the mission to "preach the good news to all creation"?

2. The Good News is presented as an occasion for judgment: if a person believes in it, he is saved HERE AND NOW; if he refuses it, he is condemned, also here and now. We should reflect on two points: (a) if we believe in the Good News, we gain an EXPERIENCE OF

SALVATION HERE AND NOW. The implication of this is that Christian believers should be happy people; they are people who have been saved. Their life on earth is already a heavenly life, (b) Salvation and condemnation on earth are not final. Those who are saved on earth are on their way to being saved eternally. Those condemned on earth will, in God's mercy, still get a chance to repent But they will have missed a chance to spend a "heaven on earth".

2.1 *Pointer for sharing.* Have you experience salvation here and now? Try to give a sharing of your experience.

3. Every Christian should be a missionary, and therefore should be able to show the signs that accompany missionary work. The sad thing is that, quite often, even those who claim they are Christian missionaries fail to show these signs.

3.1 *Pointer for sharing.* Have you been able to show the signs of being a Christian missionary?

BIBLIARSAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* The mission of Christians is to share with others the Good News they have experienced in their lives.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* The greatest Christian missionary sign is CARING FOR OTHERS that is best expressed when we help the sick recover their health.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* Although the Eleven Disciples were timid people, they were emboldened by the AFFIRMATION they got from Jesus when he entrusted them with spreading the Good News.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* Baptism is a sign that God has forgiven the sins of the person being baptized.

5. **THE GOOD NEWS.** It is easy to obtain SALVATION. All you have to do is believe, accept baptism, and be united with Jesus to the extent of making his mission your own mission.

C. STORY: Imprimatur

Catholic Bibles usually have a page where readers can see the word*. "IMPRIMATUR". It is a Latin word that means, "It may be printed." Its significance is that a bishop — a successor of the Apostles — has approved the translation of Scripture being presented to the public.

Originally, the Good News was not a book but a Person, Jesus Christ, and the oral proclamation of his works and words by the Apostles. Did this original Good News also have an "IMPRIMATUR"?

The answer is, YES. Pilgrims can still see it today in the Shrine of the Ascension. If you go there you will see a small chapel with a typical Palestinian dome. Beneath the dome is a protected piece of rock. On the rock, according to folklore, Christ imprinted his feet before he ascended to heaven. It serves as the "IMPRIMATUR" of the original Good News.

May 18, 1997

PENTECOST, Cycle A, B, C.

JOHN 20:19-23 RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost is a many splendedored thing. Paul, Luke and John have different ways of presenting it.

Paul sees the Spirit given to the Church as a source of UNITY and PEACE. To make this point clear to Christians who were having problems in their relationships, he appeals to the metaphor of the human body. He draws the parallel between it and the local Christian community of Corinth, see 1 Cor 13:1-13.

Luke in Acts 2:4 etc., extends the Pauline intuition to the universal Church without using the body metaphor. Instead, he alludes to the biblical story of the tower of Babel. For him, the Christian Pentecost is the reversal of what happened at Babel. There, people who were originally one people became many nations because of pride: groups wanted to "make a name" for themselves (see Gen 11:4). At Pentecost, people are united in the name of Jesus (see Acts 2:21; 4:12).

In today's gospel reading, John focuses on (1) the unity of Easter and Pentecost; (2) the gift of SHALOM or Peace; (3) and the power to forgive sins bestowed by the breath of Jesus.

Focus Points. (1) **V. 19, "On the evening of the first day of the week..."** Easter and Pentecost are like the graphite and the eraser in one pencil. You can hold the pencil in such a way that you see the graphite on one end and the eraser on the other end, with the length of the pencil as the space in between. However, you can also hold the pencil in such a way that you can see only one end, although you know that the other end is right there at its back. The first perspective was chosen by Luke. John took the second perspective.

(2) **V. 19 b & 21, "Peace be with you."** The Hebrew word for peace, SHALOM, suggests a fullness everything that is good. Thus the "covenant of peace" forms the climax to Ezekiel's great oracles of the future restoration: "I will make with them a covenant of peace and banish wild beasts from the land, so that they may dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods" (Ezek 34:25; "I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will bless them and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for ever more" (37:26).

It is this peace, the synonym of SALVATION and GOD'S REIGN **that** is the object of the Good News in Isaiah: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good tidings, who publishes peace, who brings good tidings of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion "our God reigns" (Isa 52:7).

When Jesus gave this peace to his disciples, he also breathed the Spirit upon them and made them THE COMMUNITY OF THE NEW COVENANT.

(3) V. 22, "He breathed on them and said: Receive the Holy Spirit." The same Hebrew word, RU'AH, means breath and spirit. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus, the Breath of Jesus.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. The Holy Spirit given to Christians is the Spirit of the Risen Christ. It is a sharing in the Spiritual Power of the Risen Christ. Hence it is different from the Spirit given to prophets in the Old Testament. As John says in 7:39, referring to the time of Christ's earthly ministry, "There was, of course, no Spirit as yet, since Jesus had not yet been glorified."

1.1 Pointer for Skewing. Have you thought of the Holy Spirit in you as your share of the Spiritual Power of the Risen Christ? Reflect on this now and share the results of your exercise with your small group.

2. Peace, for us Christians, is more than a cease-fire or the simple cessation of hostility, although these, too, may have their value. Thus, it is good if the government negotiates a cease fire with the New People's Army. It is good if there is a cessation of hostilities between the government and the Moro National Liberation Front. But it may take a long, long time before there is Christian peace in the Philippines. This kind of peace has to go hand in hand with the building of COMMUNITIES OF DISCIPLES who have accepted Christ as the one and only Master.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Is there Christian PEACE in your small group or Small Christian Community? How did it come about? Or: How will you work for it?

3. Although it was by breathing on his disciples that Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit, the Christian practice through the centuries uses the gesture of imposing hands to signify the bestowal of the Spirit. This originated from the Acts of the Apostles, which says, in 2:3-4, "Tongues of fire appeared which parted and came to rest on each of them. All were filled with the Holy Spirit." See 8:17; 19:6.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. Did you ever ask to be given the Holy Spirit through the imposition of hands? Did you receive the gift of tongues?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. **CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?** Just as Jesus shared his Spirit with his disciples, we can, to a certain degree, also share the Holy Spirit in us with other people through the exercise of charisma (charismata) or spiritual gifts.

2. **CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?** The disciples who gathered in a room, locking its door for fear of the Jews certainly were in need of courage. Jesus cared enough for them to give them "boldness", one of the charisms of the Holy Spirit, see Acts 4:13, 29 & 31 ("self-assurance", "confidence"); 9:27; 14:3; 18:26; 19:8. We can perhaps, facilitate the gaining of "boldness", "fearlessness", "self-assurance", "confidence", by our brothers and sisters.

3. **CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?** When Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (Jn 20:21b), he meant that his disciples will take his place in evangelizing the world. This is one of the greatest affirmations of the disciples ever made by Jesus. We, too, can affirm others by delegating responsibility to them.

4. **FORGIVENESS.** "If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound." (Jn 20:23).

5. **THE GOOD NEWS.** The Risen Christ has given us the Holy Spirit, and with him PEACE, SALVATION, GOD'S REIGN.

C. STORY: What's the Difference?

The Founder of a Charismatic Community in the Philippines was asked: "Father, what's the difference between the giving of the Holy Spirit on Easter Day in the Gospel of John, and the giving of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, in the book of Acts?"

The witty priest answered: "On Easter day Jesus gave the disciples chicken, but they put it in the freezer. After 50 days, on Pentecost, Jesus took the same chicken out of the freezer, cooked it and gave it to them as fried chicken."

The priest concluded with a smile: "The difference between the two viewpoints is the difference between raw, cold chicken and fried chicken. Which do you like better?"

May 25, 1997

SOLEMNITY OF THE MOST HOLY TRINITY, Cycle B

MATTHEW 28:16-20

MAKE DISCIPLES

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

God is a Trinity of Love. That is what the Church has to preach to all nations.

Before preaching, however, the original Twelve Apostles first became DISCIPLES of Jesus, disciples of love.

Then, when they were sent to preach, their preaching was to take the form of DISCIPLE-MAKING, that is, transforming people into followers of Christ, followers who come together in communitarian love. This will be the aim of their work when they baptize and teach people.

Focus Points. (1) V. 19a, "Make disciples of all the nations." From the time Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples were commissioned to go to all the nations. They will not be able to complete the work in their lifetime. Hence, the Church has to carry on their mission through the centuries, as more and more people came to be known. Their mission was not just to preach but to MAKE DISCIPLES, a much more complicated challenge.

(2) **V. 19b. "Baptize them."** When Matthew wrote these words, the Church had been engaged in the practice of ritual baptism for already more than 30 years, and his readers knew, as we know today, of what he was writing about. Yet, it might be good for us to understand also the profound reality of which this baptism is a sign or "sacrament." For "to baptize" is "to dip" or "to plunge", and the reality in which the disciples are commissioned to "plunge" all nations is not water but God himself (see next focus point).

(3) **V. 19c, "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."** According to the Greek original text, it is a matter not of baptism IN the name but of baptism INTO the name, and the "NAME" in the biblical sense of the reality of the thing or person named. Moreover, it is a matter not of the "NAMES" (plural), but of the "NAME" (singular), THE ONE REALITY OF FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT. Jesus had revealed God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and now he reveals that all men are to be "plunged" into this life of God.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. Disciples in the olden times, (and still today in monasteries of Asia), lived with their Master, forming a community with him. Discipleship is not just learning lessons from a book, but sharing in the life of the Master. "To make disciples of all the nations" cannot possibly mean putting everybody in monasteries, but it does mean teaching people to live the life of love that characterized the life of Christ. Moreover, it means that people have to come together, around the representatives of Christ, to form communities.

*/./ Pointer **for** Sharing.* Have you ever reflected on the need to join a Christian Community in order to be a true disciple of Christ? Why not do this exercise right now and share its results with your small group.

2. Being Christians, we have all been ritually baptized (the great majority of us when we were babies). This, however, is not as important as being "plunged" into the life of love that is the life of the Most Holy

Trinity. As a song says: They will know you are Christians by your love.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. Are you known to be a loving person?

3. God has only ONE NAME, not three. That name is LOVE: "God is Love" (1 Jn 4:8).

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. Did you ever wonder why we never say: "In the names (plural) of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit? Why not reflect on this now and share the Results with your small group?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? Up to the very end, Jesus was sharing something about himself, when he said: "Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth" (Mt 28:18b). We, too, should never stop sharing.

2. CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED? Jesus knew his disciples will miss his visible presence, and so he reassures them: "Know that I am with you always, until the end of time" (Mt 28:20b). We should remember that our loved ones miss us when we are absent. We should care for them by not absenting ourselves too much.

3. CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED? "At the sight of him, those who had entertained doubts fell down in homage" (Mt 28:17). When they did not see Jesus, they had doubts. When they saw him, their doubts disappeared. The sight of Jesus built them up; and they built up Jesus by giving him homage. We can use different ways of building up or affirming others.

4. FORGIVENESS. The story in Mt 28:16-20 implies that Jesus forgave those who have "entertained doubts" about him. We must be just as forgiving towards our brothers and sisters.

5. THE GOOD NEWS. Jesus has made it possible for us to share, in some degree, in the love-life of the Most Holy Trinity.

C. STORY: Three Times A Day

A practicing physician often quarreled with his wife who complained that he was so engrossed in his profession that he had no time for her and their children.

One day, the husband and wife had such a bitter quarrel that she decided to get a separation. Repentant, the doctor asked forgiveness from his wife, but she said: "Go to confession first"

At the confessional, the priest gave the absolution to the doctor, but not before prescribing a medicine to save his marriage: "Tell your wife, 'I love you' three times a day: morning, noon and night."

This cured the ailing marriage.

JUNE 1, 1996

CORPUS CHRISTI Cycle B

MARK 14:12.16. 22-26

HE BLESSED AND BROKE THE BREAD

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Jesus' EUCHARIST is first and foremost his thanksgiving for God's CHARIS or GIFT. By his thanksgiving, he recognizes and acknowledges that his whole existence, including suffering and death, is God's gift. It is in this sense that his last meal with his disciples is a Eucharistic SACRIFICE, the sign of his whole life led in loving gratitude to his Father.

Focus Points. (1) V. 22a, "During the meal he took bread." Although Jesus' last meal with his disciples was undoubtedly a Passover meal, only two elements of this meal, the bread and the wine, are given significance. There is no mention of the Paschal Lamb, which was the most characteristic viand in the Jewish Passover meal. Thus, Jesus reduces the Jewish celebration to any ordinary meal he could have taken

with his disciples. It is the simple day to day meal of bread and wine, not the elaborate, once a year meal of the Paschal Lamb, that Jesus transforms into the ultimate sign of his life-message. It will become the central celebration of the Church, the Eucharist.

(2) V. 22b, "Blessed and broke it, and gave it to them." It is by saying a prayer of "blessing" that Jews "celebrate". Jesus, therefore, celebrates the simple meal of bread and wine as a Jew who blesses and thanks God for the food and drink that he is about to receive. Only, on this occasion, he thanks God not just for the ordinary bread and wine but also for what they symbolize for him, in view of his imminent suffering and death.

(3) V. 22c - 24, "Take this," he said, "this is my body". He likewise took a cup, gave thanks and passed it to them, and they all drank from it He said to them: "This is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out on behalf of many." Whereas every pious Jew would have thanked God for the bread and wine, Jesus thank him for what they represent: his body and blood, that is, his whole human existence, culminating in his violent death, considered as a gift (*Gk. charts*). Jesus' *eucharist* is first and foremost his thanksgiving for God's *charts*. By his thanksgiving, he recognizes and acknowledges that his whole existence, including suffering and death, is God's gift. It is in this sense that his last meal with his disciples is a Eucharistic *sacrifice*, the sign of his whole life led in loving gratitude to his Father.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. The bread used at a Passover meal is unleavened bread, and St. Paul gives this a significance: "Do you not know that a little yeast has its effect all through the dough? Get rid of the old yeast to make of yourselves fresh dough, unleavened loaves, as it were; Christ our Passover has been sacrificed. Let us celebrate the feast not with the old yeast, that of corruption and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Cor 5:6b-8). However, as explained above (Focus point 1), this is secondary in the Eucharist. What is of prime importance is that Christ gives HIMSELF — not just his physical body

and blood but the entire human life he lived from conception to death — as a sacrifice for the salvation of the whole human race. <> In the Latin Church tradition that we follow in the Philippines, we use unleavened bread for the Eucharist. However, in cases when we have the opportunity to join a Greek Catholic celebration of the Eucharist where leavened bread is used, we should not hesitate to take communion because, as at a Latin Mass, we will also commune with the same Jesus Christ, our Risen Lord and Savior.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Our food, when we take communion at Mass, is not the little piece of unleavened bread given to us, but Jesus Christ Risen from the dead after he offered his entire life from Nazareth to Calvary as a sacrifice to atone for our sins. Reflect on this truth, and share the results of your reflection with your small group.

2. The actions of Christ in instituting the Eucharist have the same pattern as his actions in multiplying loaves for the hungry crowd, see Mk 8:6b "Taking the seven loaves **he** gave **thanks, broke them, and gave them to** his disciples to distribute..." <> From earliest Christian times the celebration of the Eucharist went hand in hand with care for the poor.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. When there are poor people in our Christian community, can we truly celebrate the Eucharist without manifesting our care for our poor brothers and sisters? Why not reflect on this and share the results with your small group?

3. In the Liturgy of the Eucharist (the second part of the Mass), we unite with Jesus in offering his sacrifice (his whole life on earth together with his death on the Cross) to the Father, and we celebrate our communion with him as our Risen Lord and Savior. The Sacrifice and the Communion are equally important.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. Through the years, have you grown in your understanding and appreciation of* Holy Mass?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. **CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?** During his earthly life, Jesus had no material goods to share with others except his own body and blood. When he gave these "material goods" to his disciples they represented the most precious life that ever existed in this planet, his own life which was human and divine. We too, when we share something material like money, should share it as representing something personal, like our labors and sacrifices.

2. **CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?** The owner of the "upstairs room" (Mk 14:14-15) is an example of "someone who cares". Without much ado he responded to the need of Jesus and his disciples to have a room for the celebration of the Passover that was to be the Lord's Last Supper. We, too, should respond promptly and generously to the needs of our brothers and sisters.

3. **CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?** We affirm others when we put our trust in them. Let us follow the example of Jesus who entrusted the preparation of the Last Supper to two of his disciples, see Mk 14:13.

4. **FORGIVENESS.** It should be easy for us to forgive our brothers and sisters when we remember that Jesus has already paid for their sins, no matter how great. The price Jesus paid was no less than his blood, the blood of the covenant (see Mk 14:24).

5. **THE GOOD NEWS.** Jesus gave his body and blood for us JOYFULLY. After the institution of the Eucharist, he sang songs of praise before proceeding to the Mount of Olives: see Mk 14:26.

C. STORY: Breaking Bread

At a certain Biblical workshop, a participant read a phrase in a report that perplexed him. So he asked the reporter: "Brother, what do you mean by *breaking the bread of Scriptures!*" At that, they exchanged questions and answers.

Reporter: "When you are listening to a long lecture, don't you ask for a *break*?"

Participant: "Yes, I do."

Reporter: "What do you enjoy better, the lecture or the break?"

Participant: "That depends. If the lecture is boring, I enjoy the break more."

Reporter: "That's the answer to your question. When life becomes boring, we need a break. We should read and meditate on Scripture, and feed our souls. That's called *breaking, the bread of Scriptures*."

Someone in the audience said: "That's the lunch break. The dinner break is the Eucharist." He was given a big round of applause.

June 8, 1997
FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

MARK 3:20-35
JESUS NEW FAMILY

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Fortunately, from time to time, priests use Eucharistic Prayer in, which says after the Consecration: "Father, hear the prayers of the *family* you have gathered here before you. In mercy and love unite all your children *wherever they may be*." This prayer proclaims two things: (a) first, that any group of the faithful celebrating the Eucharist form a LOCAL CHURCH WHICH IS GOD'S FAMILY; (b) secondly, similar families are found in many other places in the world, and the unity of all these families is something highly desirable.

The Church is the NEW FAMILY OF JESUS CHRIST. It is not flesh and blood that binds this family together, but DOING THE WILL OF GOD.

Focus Points. (1) V. 21, "**His family... came to take charge of him, saying: He is out of his mind.**" The family spoken of here consists of the relatives of Jesus *excluding his mother, who will come late, see v. 31.* In their opinion, Jesus was "out of his mind." In its Jewish setting, this phrase means the same as "he is possessed by an evil spirit," hence, the relatives of Jesus had the same idea as the scribes who said, "He is possessed by Beelzebul."

(2) V. 28-30, " **whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven.**" The above mentioned relatives of Jesus are just as guilty as the scribes in committing a BLASPHEMY AGAINST THE HOLY SPIRIT. This consists of refusing to recognize the exorcisms of Jesus as proof of his power to forgive sins. It is a refusal to ask forgiveness of sins from Jesus, and for this reason it is a sin that can not be forgiven.

(3) V. 33-35, "He said **in reply: Who are my mother and my brothers? And** gazing around him at those seated **in the circle he continued:** These are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does **the will of God** is brother and sister and mother to me." It may seem at first that Mary is among those rejected by Christ as his true relative, because she was not among those "seated in the circle" but "stood outside" (see v. 31). However, we should notice that v. 35, "whoever does the will of God is brother and sister and mother to me," is not limited to "those seated in the circle". We can in fact argue that Jesus made this generalization precisely so as not to include his mother among the relatives he was rejecting (because they, on their part, rejected him). <> The new family of Jesus will not be based on blood ties but on obedience to the will of God and on docility to the Holy Spirit. As St. Paul would put it, "All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God" (Rom 8:14).

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. Jesus cut his ties with his family and relatives when he left home to be baptized by John at the Jordan river. At that time, God acknowledged him as his "beloved Son" on whom his favor rests (see

Mk 1:11). He began his ministry as Messiah. He was no longer merely the "Son of Joseph" (Lk 3:23; 4:22; Jn 1:45; 6:42) or the "Son of Mary" (Mk 6:3; Mt 13:55), although his town mates did not realize this, see Mk 6:3. His town mates rejected him for "they found him too much for them" (Mk 6:3c). o Jesus practiced what he preached. He required his disciples to love him and the Reign of God more than their own father or mother, brother or sister (see Mt 10:37; Lk 14:26).

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Do family ties hinder a person from totally giving himself or herself to the service of God's Reign? What is your experience in this matter?

2. The root of "blasphemy against the Holy Spirit" is pride, which was Satan's sin.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. From your experience, what is the reason why people refuse to be converted to Christ?

3. It seems that the relatives of Jesus tried to use Mary as a "bait" to try to get Jesus out of the house so that they could "take charge of him". Jesus, however, excludes her from those relatives whom he disowns. Jesus does not say that only those with him inside the house were his relatives. On the contrary, he generalizes and says: "*whoever...*" Mary is certainly among those who do the will of God.

3.1 Pointer for Sharing. In your experience, has obedience to God's will given you a taste of being under the reign of God or of belonging to the new family of Jesus Christ?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED? It was to those inside the house (see Mk 3:20), in the "circle" (see Mk 3:34) that is, to his disciples, that Jesus primarily shared his wisdom, although he did not drive away those outside the house. Similarly, our sharing should be primarily directed to the members of our community, although we should not forget those outside.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Jesus' relatives showed a misplaced caring for him (Mk 3:21). This was because they failed to understand him. It is only when we understand a person that we can truly care for him or her.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* In today's Gospel Reading Jesus affirmed those "seated in the circle" inside the house as his new family. We affirm other when we make them feel they are part of the family.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* When forgiveness has to do with a serious matter, it can be given only to those who seek forgiveness.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* The disciples of Jesus are his NEW FAMILY.

C. STORY: Parable of the Beautiful Eyes

A pretty Belgian girl with blue eyes fell in love with a talented but blind Filipino. When her friends asked her, "Why did you choose him from among your many suitors?" She answered: "Love is blind."

Years passed and the couple had three children, all of them with healthy and beautiful eyes. One day, a priest looking at them and knowing their story, told his friends: "The Church is the new family of Christ, like these children."

He continued: "One parent of the Church is Christ, who has healthy eyes. Another parent of the Church is the Jewish people. This parent is blind."

He concluded: "With the children, a new generation begins. A new generation with beautiful, healthy eyes."

June 15, 1997

ELEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

MARK 4:26-34

TWO PARABLES ON THE REIGN OF GOD

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

The "brothers" of Jesus, according to Acts 1:14, were at the "upstairs room" (later called the Cenacle), together with all the other disciples of Jesus, praying as they waited for the coming of the Holy Spirit. Yet, initially, these relatives of Jesus were among the people of Nazareth who did not want to accept Jesus because "they found him too much for them" (Mk 6:3). How did they get converted to Jesus? No answer can be found in the Gospels except the parable of the self-growing seed in the first half of today's Gospel reading (Mk 4:26-29).

The other half of today's reading (Mk 4:30-34) is the parable of the mustard seed, which brings out the contrast between the smallness of the Kingdom's beginning and the greatness of its end.

Focus Points. (1) V. 26 "This is how **it** is with the reign of God. A man scatters seed on the ground..." The *gospel*, God's word, is like a seed: see Mk 4:3-9. 14-20. 30-32. The parable of the self-growing seed leads to the insight that even people's response to, their good disposition towards, the *gospel*, is the fruit of the *gospel*. As Yahweh's word, it is efficacious (see Is 55:10-11).

(2) V. 30-32, "The reigns of God... is like mustard seed which, when planted in the soil, is the smallest of all the earth's seeds, yet once it is sown, springs up to become the largest of shrubs, with branches big enough for the birds of the sky to build nests in its shade." The biblical mustard is not the vegetable we call "mustasa" in the Philippines. It is a plant more like the *okra*, which grows normally to 3 to 4 feet tall, and is raised commercially for its seeds, from which mustard paste can be made and used for hot-dogs and hamburgers. In extraordinarily good climate, the plant can grow up to 15 feet, and it

looks like a small tree — something like our *aratUis*. The seeds are also like the aratilis in size, but they are dry, not like the aratilis seeds that are encased in a jellied globule. <> Mark is not giving us a lesson in botany. He intends to show that the everlasting covenant (Is 61:8) described in terms of vegetation, has arrived with Jesus' word, that Jesus is the herald (Is 61:1-2) of the good news that, "as the earth brings forth its shoots, and as a garden causes what is sown in it to spring up, so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations" (Is 61:11).

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. For Mark, the parable of the seed growing by itself is illustrated in real life by the Roman centurion who, at calvary suddenly made an act of faith in Jesus: "The centurion who stood guard over him, on seeing the manner of his death, declared: Clearly this man was the Son of God!" (Mk 15:39).

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Have you witnessed any instance of an unexpected conversion to Jesus Christ?

2. There are elements of exaggeration in the parable of the mustard seed as when it is said that "once it is sown it springs up to become the largest of the shrubs" when, normally, it gets to be only about four feet high. Moreover, normally, birds do not go to the mustard plant to build nests but to eat the seeds. The reason for these exaggerations is that, when this parable was written down by Mark around the year 64 AD, about 15 to 20 years after Jesus taught it, the mustard plant had already be understood as a symbol of the Church. The birds that build nests in this tree are the people from different places like Samaria, Antioch, Cyprus, Athens, Rome, etc., who have become followers of Christ and ecclesial communities.

2.1 Pointer for Sharing. What does the mustard seed turned into a tree symbolize for you, personally? Share the results of your reflection with your small group.

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* Parables are stories taken from day to day happenings, which are transformed into vehicles of God's word. Let us share such stories with our brothers and sisters in the community.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* A Christian community is like a tree "with branches big enough for the birds of the sky to build nests in its shade." When we care for our brothers and sisters we provide them with what is symbolized by the "branches" and the "shade".

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* Affirmation and sharing go together just as, in a tree, branches and leaves go together.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* For some reason, the disciples were slow in learning the lessons Jesus taught. Jesus was patient with them and forgave them: "he kept explaining things privately to his disciples" (Mk 4:34).

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* The Gospel is like a seed that has a hidden POWER to become more than a thousand times or a million times bigger than its original size.

C. STORY: Golden Shower Tree

A city boy who was about ten years old went to the province for vacation. There, his lola told him: "Your father believes that an educated man should have at least three projects in his life, namely, plant a tree, beget a child, and write a book."

Boy: "Is that the reason why my father is now writing a book?"

Lola: "Yes. That is his third project, because he has already finished the first two. You know, he planted that Golden Shower tree that is now in full bloom before he left home to settle in the city. Then, you are the proof that his second project has been successful."

The boy resolved to imitate his father. So, when he went home from vacation, he brought with him some to the long, brown and hard pods that contained the seeds of the Golden Shower. He planted these in their city backyard.

One year passed, but nothing grew. The boy was about to dig up the seeds to find out what was wrong with them, but on second thought, he went to learn from his father.

His father said: "The seed covering of the Golden Shower is very hard. It takes more than one year for it to rot and release the seed. Wait for another year."

So the boy waited and one year later he was rewarded with sturdy Golden Shower seedlings. By planting them in strategic places in their garden, he finished the first project that an educated man must do in his life, when he was only twelve years old.

June 22, 1997

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, Cycle B

MARK 4:35-41

THE WIND AND SEA OBEY HIM

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

Jesus' calming of the storm is an illustration of the creative power of the *gospel*. If we listen to the *gospel* and obey it, as the elements do, we will experience a great calm. We will be created anew (2 Cor 5:17). Only, unlike the disciples in the boat (a symbol of the church), we must not be afraid to believe the *gospel*.

Focus Points. (1) V. 39, "He awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea: Quiet! Be still! The wind fell off and everything grew calm." For the disciples of Jesus, rescue from water, for example, in the stories of Noah (Gen 6-8), of Moses (ex 2:1-10) and of the crossing of the Red Sea (Ex 14:10-31), was the most forceful sign of God's saving

favor towards his loved ones (as made abundantly clear in Ps 107:23-31). Seen against this background, Jesus' calming of the storm is yet another sign that God's creative and redemptive power is at work in him, especially in his *word*. Mark heightens this significance by presenting it as an *exorcism*, evoking the expulsion of the impure spirit in 1:21-27.

(2) V. 41, "A great awe overcame them at this. They kept saying to one another: Who can this be that the wind and sea obey him?" Readers can easily answer the disciples' question, because, in the light of the Resurrection, it is clear that Jesus is the Son of God, who has the same power that God exercised by creating the world. However, when the event happened, the disciples' minds were still blinded by their false ideas about a political Messiah and their hearts were still far away from accepting Jesus as the Redeemer whose power terrifies Satan himself.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. What Jesus did for his disciples by saving them from the terrifying storm, he still does for us today, although our "storms" are not always caused by atmospheric conditions. Quite often, we, too, react in the same way as the disciples, that is, we are grateful for having been saved from danger, but we do not grow in knowing Jesus better and loving him more.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. What should be more important in our lives: the favors we receive from God or the growth in the knowledge and love of Jesus, which should be the result of these favors? Share your reflection with your small group.

2. Sometimes, events happen in our lives by which Jesus reveals himself — not necessarily by visions or prophetic words but through the solution of our problems. Like the disciples in today's Gospel reading, we are shaken or exhilarated by the event, but we do not grasp the revelation. This happened, for example during the EDS A People's Power revolt.

2.1 *Pointer for Sharing.* What should we do be more sensitive to the revelation that God conveys to us through events in our lives? Can your experience help you answer this question?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* Sometimes, to get others to share their hidden potentials with the community, we have to wake them up.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* Sometime, we think that God abandoned his creation, including mankind, because he rested on the seventh day. God's rest, however, is not cessation from activity. God simply shifted from "creation" to "providence". At every moment, beneath us are the everlasting arms by which God shows his care for each and everyone of us. We should become his partners in caring for our poor brothers and sisters.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* Jesus affirmed his disciples by entrusting himself to their care. He was so confident that they could cope with any challenge that he went to sleep. This symbolizes Christ's continuing affirmation of his Church. His "sleep" symbolizes his Ascension to heaven. In spite of "storms" the Church should not be terrified. It should not lack in faith.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* Once more, Christ bears with his disciples although they are "lacking in faith." We, too, should be patient with our brothers and sisters.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* In spite of appearances, *hindi natutulog ang Diyos (God does not sleep).*

. C. STORY: A Tricky Bible Quiz

In a certain town in America there is a popular TV Bible Quiz show. Sometimes, the Quiz Master asks tricky questions and the contestants are given a bonus when they can match his good humor.

Quiz Master: "Where in the Bible do we find the first Ghost story?"

Winning Contestant: "In the book of Genesis, where it says: The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (NIV).

Quiz Master: "Why do some people believe in ghosts?"

Winning Contestant: "Because according to Mark 6:49: When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost."

Quiz Master: "When did Jesus make himself so small that he could sleep on a cushion?"

Winning Contestant: "When he and his disciples crossed the lake. There was a storm but Jesus was in the stern, sleeping on a cushion."

June 29, 1997

SOLEMNITY OF STS. PETER AND PAUL

MATTHEW 16:13-19
VICTORY OVER DEATH

A. STUDY OF THE TEXT / BIBLIARASAL STEP 3

It is recorded in the history of the martyrdom of St. Lorenzo Ruiz and his companions in Japan that when the news reached Manila, there was a ringing of bells in jubilation. This small historical item is a reminder that, traditionally, Christians look on the death of their martyrs as their BIRTHDAY IN HEAVEN.

A similar paradox can be seen in the fact that, for the feast of St. Peter and St. Paul we are presented with three readings and a responsorial psalm which all proclaim God's providence over his chosen ones.

Focus Points. (1) V. 18a, "I for my part declare to you, you are 'Rock,' and on this rock I will build my church." It was not on Peter alone but on him and his successors that Christ will build his church. This means that, whatever it is that Christ saw in Peter that made him a "rock" is not the person of Peter; it is not something that lived or died with him. It is something that he symbolized. It is the Gospel and people's response to it, as articulated by Peter when, in answer to Christ's question, "who do you say that I am?" he answered: "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God!" (v. 15-16).

(2) V. 18b, "And the jaws of death shall not prevail against it." By his resurrection Jesus did not simply survive death, nor was he merely rescued from it. He destroyed death. As Paul put it, "death no longer has dominion over him" (Rom 6:9). In the same vein, the disciple is called to share fully in Jesus' career of living, dying and destroying death. This is what Jesus meant in his words to Peter, "and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it." Jesus did not promise that his disciples would not die but that death would not be able to hold them and prevent them from going on with their mission. Hence until now, even after his death, Peter is fulfilling his mission of being the rock on which Christ builds his church.

B. REFLECTION POINTS

BIBLIARASAL STEPS 4 & 5: GOD SPEAKS, WE LISTEN & SHARE

1. When we ourselves profess faith in Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of the Living God, we participate in being the rock on which Jesus builds his Church.

1.1 Pointer for Sharing. Has your own faith in Christ been strengthened by the faith of Peter or the personal example or pastoral writings of a Pope who has succeeded Peter?

2. Paul, in contrast to Peter, did not belong to the Twelve who witnessed the earthly ministry of Christ before his resurrection. In this sense he did not belong to the "institutional" foundation of the Church. However, he represents the charismatic aspect of the Church. We should

not oppose these two aspects because, in his own way, Peter was also a charismatic. The point is, whereas the role of Peter is to be conservative, that of Paul was to be progressive. The two roles compliment each other in the total WITNESS that the Church should give to the presence of the Kingdom of God in the world.

2.1 *Pointer for Sharing.* Whom would you like to imitate more: Peter or Paul?

BIBLIARASAL STEP 6: SEARCH

1. *CAN OUR SHARING BE IMPROVED?* It could be said that, of the Twelve Apostles, Peter was the best in sharing, and for this reason he was chosen to be the "Rock" on which Christ will build his Church. We should imitate him in being always ready to share.

2. *CAN OUR CARING BE IMPROVED?* It was because cared for those who will become Christians after the first generation of the Church that Christ instituted a succession of leaders of the Church on earth. We should care enough for our brothers and sisters to provide for their future.

3. *CAN OUR AFFIRMATION BE IMPROVED?* Christ himself gave us an example of affirmation when he said to Peter: "You are 'Rock,' and on this rock I will build my Church". In our own way, let us imitate this example of Christ.

4. *FORGIVENESS.* Both Peter and Paul were people who were forgiven by Jesus. Let us take them as models when we remember that, like them, we have been forgiven by Christ.

5. *THE GOOD NEWS.* Even after death, the disciples of Christ, in a very real and effective way, continue the mission entrusted to them by Christ.

C. STORY: Paul Meets Peter

Contrary to the belief of some people, Peter and Paul were not martyred at the same time. Peter was martyred earlier (in AD 64) and

Ghrist immediately put him in charge of opening and closing the gates of heaven, and interviewing people who sought admittance.

Paul died about three years later (in AD 67) and Peter had to interview him at the gate of heaven.

Peter: "Paul, where is your head? Why are you headless like that?"

Paul: "My head is still on earth. Some people cut it off and some people want to keep it as a souvenir."

Peter: "That reminds me that you are a Roman citizen and that's why they could not crucify you."

Paul: "Yes, I'm a Roman citizen but I also applied to be a citizen of heaven long ago."

Peter: "That must have been very long ago, because I can't find your application anymore. You see, we erase our old files from our computers." (They already had computers in heaven long before they were invented on earth).

Paul: "Never mind. Just remind the Boss, Jesus Christ, that he had appointed me his ambassador on earth."

That did the trick. Paul was allowed to enter heaven.