

# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

*Vol. LXXVII, No. 822*

*\_ January-February 2001*

**DOMINUS IKSUS**

*Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith*

**THE GIFT OF MISSION**

*James Kroeger, MM*

**"MISSIONS" AND THE CHURCH  
IN THE PHILIPPINES**

*CBCP*

**INTERRELIGIOUS MEETING IN JERUSALEM**

*John Paul II*

# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

## The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS, the Official Interdiocesan Organ, is published by-monthly by the University of Santo Tomas and is printed at Lucky Press, Inc., Manila, Philippines. Entered as Second Class Mail Matter at the Manila Post Office on June 31, 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	P425.00	P75.00
Foreign: (Via Air Mail)	US\$ 45.00	\$15.00

Subscriptions are paid in advance. In the Philippines, payments should be made by postal 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

Ecclesiastical Publications Office

University of Santo Tomas

Espana, Manila, Philippines

Tel. No. 731-31-01 local 8251    Telefax: 740-97-10

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## ***EDITOR'S NOTE***

# **Prayer for the Nation\***

God of Love, Father of us all  
In wisdom and goodness you guide creation  
To fulfillment in Christ your Son.

As a nation, we are once again at a crucial and difficult moment. We are wary of our political leaders' motivations, angered by their brazenness, confused and divided by their tactics and strategies. We are distracted from our greater current tasks of developing our economy, improving the lot of your poor and marginalized, and protecting our environment.

Our Loving Father, help us.

Open our eyes and minds to the real situation.

Inflame us to desire to do something, as individuals but especially as your Church. Strengthen and guide our bishops, our priests, and our lay leaders, as they in turn lead us to collective action. Guide and sustain us in what we must do.

Touch our political leaders;

Those who are responsible for the corruption and cronyism that plunder our country and those who willingly or unwillingly lend themselves to these forces.

Love them, as only You can, into conversion and a change of heart.

\* We are publishing a prayer recited in the Churches of Cebu for peace and settlement of Socio-Political problems.

Shower on them your compassion and mercy, your truth and your justice. Help them become responsive to the genuine needs of our people.

We ask pardon for our sins both individual sins and the sins of our society.

Help us make amends and repair the harm that has been done.

Finally, with Mary to whose Immaculate Heart our Nation and our people have been entrusted, we ask You, that in our constant turning to You, in our dependence on You, in our searching for Your will in our struggling to do it, we may grow in the likeness of your Son, Jesus Christ who is Lord forever and ever. Amen.

## **At the Service of Justice and Peace\***

**LEONARDO LEGASPI, OP, DD**

The country has been wracked by scams and scandals almost every month. The Singson Scandal is the latest of these collective schemes wrecking our society.

The situation is certainly disturbing and critical. The economic crisis drives our already restless people into revulsion at the betrayal of public trust. The political disarray mires the country in instability, and puts constitutional processes into doubt and uncertainty. The loss in our sense of social priorities has also become a loss of our sense of propriety - the sense of *delicadeza* - and, hence the erosion of our culture. The situation has become a moral issue.

For this, the Church of Caceres, at the service of justice and peace, has to speak and ask you, all our faithful, to act. After a reasoned reflection, permit us to offer you four (4) "signs of the times" within an objective whole of possibilities we believe the Estrada Administration should listen to and heed for the good of the Filipino nation:

First: Revolution, the form of which can be uncertain, yet a restless people revolted by betrayal of public trust may well take;

\* A Pastoral Statement on the Singson Scandal.

Second: Snap Election, processes of which can be so lengthy and complicated, and quite a remote response to an immediate need;

Third: Impeachment, the time for which seems to be too short to be completed without being overtaken by uncertain events; and,

Fourth: Resignation of the Chief Executive from Office.

Of this four (4) signs, the fourth - resignation from office - seems to be the most honorable and patriotic act for the Chief Executive. It can prevent violence from breaking out, and enable our people to regain public trust and confidence in democracy. It is best suited to promote the common good of all without social disruption and without the violation of constitutional processes.

By Resignation from Office, we, therefore, urge our Chief Executive, to take a leave of absence from the government. This is to allow the fullest, impartial investigation of allegations without undue fear and pressure upon all those concerned. Then, if accusations are proven false, his name is therefore vindicated and may claim back his Office should he still wish to do so. Otherwise, the full force of the constitutional process should take its course.

In this same light, we urge all those involved in the Scandal, particularly those in the Bicol Region so named with those willing or unwitting parties, to take the same purposive act of honor and patriotism - resign from public office!

We enjoin our faithful to make this same act of reasoned reflection by praying, studying and acting together. And, should you think as we do, then indeed act as we do now.

Entrusting our actions to Our Lady of Penafrancia.

# **Statement of Support and Concern\***

**FRANCISCO MONJE**

While in Rome, attending the Jubilee of Bishops, Most Rev. Jesus Y. Varela called us up to convey his sentiment regarding the expose on the involvement of President Estrada in Jueteng. True to his instructions we issue this statement:

As the CBCP has called on the people to "pray together, reflect together and act together" to resolve the crises that followed the revelation of President Joseph Estrada's alleged involvement in *jueteng* operations, we, the members of the Clergy of the Diocese of Sorsogon, issue this Statement of Support in response to the CBCP's call.

As your pastors, we have always condemned gambling in all its forms.

We have watched with frustration as government gradually legalized many forms of gambling and turned it into an economic program, disregarding the pernicious effect it will bring to our values and our work ethic. To us, it was a barter of the dignity of labor for the sin of Sloth, sanctioning legally the quick and effortless means to riches, while demeaning the value and dignity of honest labor.

\* A Statement issued in behalf of the Bishop and the Clergy of the Diocese of Sorsogon.



Not content with the forms of gambling already legalized, unscrupulous government authorities still tolerated a nationwide network of illegal acts, amassing dirty money to finance personal vices and influence political and social directions — by bribes, hiring of goons, and purchase of instruments of violence — to pervert the people's will. Money, easily, illegally, and immorally obtained from gambling engendered many other crimes, compounding the evils of society and the structures of social sins.

God in his justice, now chose to intervene. The present expose by Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson, a major link in the *jueteng* network, has brought out in the open the alleged involvement of President Joseph Ejercito Estrada, some cabinet members, and lesser public officials and police officers. A glaring chain of corruption is now unveiled, starting from the top and creeping through the entire structure of government. We have long unmasked this breach of public trust and inveighed against it. However, it is sad that the evils of government are better appreciated and only thoroughly investigated when revealed, not by crusaders, but by insider felons who are major players and profiteers of the illegal escapades.

Yet, we are relieved that the time for **CONFESSION** of this evil has now come to pass. Albeit we are closely watching the unfolding of events, taking note of the Act of **CONTRITION**, where the President has expressed sorrow for taking advantage of the weak culture of the people. He has now vowed to remove gambling operations from the hands of government.

Still, we say that it is not enough to merely remove gambling from government's hands, but insist that it should not be passed on to other entities, since it will have the same deleterious effect on our values, and will not stop corrupt and crafty government officials from dipping their fingers into its perverse profits. The network of gambling and all illegal activities must be completely dismantled in all levels of government and society.

We stand firm in our conviction that, in the face of past scandals, scams and this hideous expose, President Estrada has lost his moral ascendancy to govern and now must resign and give way to the Constitutional process of succession. This is the only honorable act for a Chief Executive that can peaceably pave the way to regain the people's faith in democracy. It will also be an honorable act for members of both Houses of Congress to erase partisan and self interests and now act in the interest of the Filipino people. Where Estrada has failed in fulfilling his promise of "**walang kamaganak, walang kaibigan**", members of Congress can now amend this by performing their sworn duties, under a "**walang kapartido**" attitude.

We urge that the entire bureaucracy should undergo purgation, from top to bottom. All those guilty of abuse of authority and who betrayed the people's trust must be given a fitting PENANCE for their grave sins, even if they have resigned. Even as our hearts are ready to forgive, the integrity of the Sacrament of Reconciliation must be fully constituted for sincere expiation and acts of true REPENTANCE.

To our faithful, pray with us for a total Catharsis in government and society. Let our prayers be coupled with sustained vigilance and unified action. This present crisis must not dampen our spirit but let it be a rallying opportunity for a God-given grace to start building, again, a morally upright government and a citizenry truly inspired by the Holy Spirit.

# Lord, Heal Our Land

**JAIME CARD. SIN, DD**

Circular No. 2001-01  
05 January 2001

Something in us died last December 30, 2000 when only a few days after Christmas, innocent Filipinos were killed by bomb explosions that up to now remain unsolved.

Since January 1, the World Day of Peace, I have been offering Masses for the eternal repose of those who died in the bombings. I have been praying, too, for their grieving loved ones. My novena for them will end on January 9, the feast of the Black Nazarene of Quiapo.

If the President cannot give us an example of moral leadership, if the police and military cannot protect innocent citizens from terroristic attacks in the middle of the city, if our Cabinet Secretaries cannot appreciate overwhelming evidences that the President is so corrupt and immoral and continue to support him, where else can we turn to?

If the government cannot help us find the killers of Fr. **Benjamin** Inocencio of Jolo, and the abductors of Bobby Dacer, to whom shall we turn?

This government has not only lost its moral ascendancy to govern. It seems like this government cannot even give us private citizens the peace and order that public servants owe the citizenry.

Let us turn to the Lord and beg him to heal our land. Let us turn to Mary and beg her to bring peace to our land.

Were it not for my faith in God, I would have fallen into despair long ago. Our hope is in the Lord. Lord Jesus, we trust in you.

# **Water is Life**

## **CBCP**

### **Introduction**

Twelve years ago, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, issued a Pastoral Letter on the Environment entitled "What Is Happening to Our Beautiful Land?" That Pastoral Letter described the devastation that had been inflicted on the environment reflected, in the light of the Gospel, on what was happening to the environment, challenged us to develop a deeper appreciation for the fragility of the life systems in our islands and to defend the Earth, pointing to signs of hope, suggesting what we all could do to improve the situation.

We focused then on what should be the Christian attitude towards nature and responsibility to care for our physical environment. That responsibility, we said, stems from this simple fact: we treasure God's gift of life to us and all that he created to make life possible and human.

In this year of Jubilee, with its spirit of renewal, reconciliation and re-conversion, it is good that we recall once again our obligation to care for God's creation in the face of its continuing degradation in this, our part of the world.

In this letter; we would like to focus on one critical environmental problem: water and the protection of our watersheds and aquifers. For water means life and life is God's greatest physical gift to us.

## ***WATER AND LIFE***

### **Water Insecurity**

That the country is facing water insecurity may come as a surprise. We have an average of twenty typhoons a year and yet despite the torrential rains and the all too frequent flooding, we do not have a sustainable supply of water. Water insecurity is one of the most serious environmental problems facing the country today and it is not the kind of problem that can be solved overnight.

Until quite recently water was not seen as a matter of concern. In parts of the country, even today, households and businesses have open access to this resource. Water is used freely for agriculture, industry, leisure and household purposes. The impression has thus been created that there is an endless supply. Water is taken for granted and like all things that are taken for granted, they are never really appreciated until they become scarce. We only really know the true worth of water when the well goes dry.

Every living organism in our environment depends on water: flowers, grasses, shrubs, trees, all our food crops. Animals depend on water. Every issue that affects the environment — whether it be the construction of a new road, the opening of a mine, the building of a golf course, the construction of a dam or an irrigation system, the conversion of land for residential or industrial use, the development of plantations, the preservation of biodiversity — all have to do with water.

Water goes in a cycle. It connects the earth to the sky, the uplands to the lowlands, the mountains to the coastal areas. Rain

falls from the clouds, seeps into the ground and makes its way down into the aquifers. From aquifers it rises in streams, rivers and lakes and runs down to the sea. Water returns to the atmosphere again by evaporation from the surface of lakes, rivers and oceans through the transpiration of plants. The environment is intimately interconnected and water is the life-giving link.

## The Destruction of Watersheds

Why is flooding in the lowlands occurring more frequently? Why are our watersheds not able to supply the waters we need at some times of the year? The simple reason is that we have denuded the uplands of forest cover and degraded our rivers with the subsequent soil erosion, and the waste too that we throw into the sea. Who is responsible for this destruction? One recent study, *Decline of the Philippine Forest*, states:

Since most of the Philippine forest was on public land, it was up to government to decide how to make use of it. They were responsible for the management of this national treasure. The situation today is the direct result of the non-implementation of policies and the corruption of former administrations. Deforestation did not just happen. It came about as a result of choices made by government, choices that in effect turned control of the forests over to a small group of people and sustained the marginalization of millions of people.<sup>1</sup>

It would be difficult to exaggerate the part played by elite **control and** corruption in explaining the destruction of the **Philippine** forest. Since the elite in effect participated in the government and the logging industry, this led to corrupt and inefficient regulation by government of the logging industry. To

<sup>1</sup> Environmental Science for Social Change, 1999. *Decline of the Philippine Forests*, Phils.: Bookmark.

avoid initiating meaningful structural reform of the socioeconomic system, government encouraged the poor to migrate to previously forested areas. Data on forest cover released by government, instead of presenting a true picture of what was really happening, were designed to mislead the media and researchers. The analysis of data sets makes it difficult to draw any other conclusion. The destructive practices pursued by the logging concessionaires set the example for the poor migrants who followed. The financial returns from logging did not benefit the nation as a whole. Enormous sums were concentrated in the hands of the elite. This exacerbated the problem of the unequal distribution of income, the greatest structural problem in the Philippines today. The above factors have ensured and hastened the destruction of our forests and watersheds.

The direct causes of deforestation have been logging, upland migration, and agricultural expansion. These could have been carried out in a manner that would have contributed to the overall development of the country and thus benefited the majority of the people, but did not.

However, they were not. Less than 500 individuals and corporations hold access rights to most of the forest resources. The fact underscores the great injustice being done to our people.

Ill conceived state policies and programs geared to exploitation have led to the plunder of a natural resource and ensured that meaningful development would never take place. The responsibility for the present sad state of the Philippines watersheds rests with past administrations, greed — "the most evident form of moral underdevelopment" — and social ignorance. There has been, needless to say, a near total failure on the part of government and society as a whole to recognize the sociocultural and ecological values of the forests.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*



## Ecological Services

It is necessary, hence, to understand the environment from the perspective of ecological services. Ecological services are the benefits we derive from the environment, such as, carbon sequestration, fertile soil, clean drinking water, sustained steam flow for irrigation and flood reduction. People in the uplands and lowlands depend on these services. If they are abused and exploited by the few then the many will suffer. An ecological services perspective means that we no longer view the link between the uplands and the lowlands as purely resource utilization. It is much more complex and includes the interrelations of social, cultural, economic, political, ecological, climatic and hydrological aspects of life. On all these counts the balance of the uplands has been marginalized and we have the anomaly of people in the uplands having the responsibility for maintaining the ecological services and those in the lowlands enjoying most of the benefits! Justice and an ecological perspective demand that the people in the uplands, who make such an important contribution to the well being of society as a whole and know how to balance the demands of a healthy environment against their day-to-day needs, should enjoy social, cultural, economic and political equity.

The ruling value in present day society is short-term economic gain and vaguely tagged on is the promise of long term-stability. If real and meaningful national development were taking place, the country would not be facing water and food insecurity; we would not be facing the situation where the Philippines, once a leading wood exporter, is now a net wood importer. We would not have in the Philippines today some 32 percent of the people — or 27 million Filipinos, our brothers and sisters — living below the poverty line, struggling to survive on incomes of less than PI 5,000 a year or about a dollar a day. The fear today is that this short-term-economic-gain mindset will dominate in the exploitation of

natural resources. Thus, in the drive to pursue mining as an answer to our economic development, what guarantee is there that what happened in the case of our forests will not happen again? To start with, we need to conduct a responsible dialogue and to commit ourselves to a serious code of environmental practice. This code must be respectful of the people in the area, take account of the sustainability of the environment on the site and ensure full protection downstream.

This is said with hindsight, we know, and prescinds from the question of a paternalism in our culture, which, in the past, was not so readily considered as an obstacle to national growth. Neither does the above critique acknowledge that during the early stages of deforestation it was hard to draw the line and to know when the damage done was excessive. At a later stage when this was known politically and economically, controls were inadequate and a much broader social sin reinforced the wrong.

Today we have become more aware of "social sin" and the "structure of sin". These are "situations of sin" that result from the accumulation and concentration of many personal sins. As a result of the acts or omissions of individuals, structures take root in society that influence behavior and are the source of other sins and injustices. These structures make it much more difficult to promote the common good and result in the exploitation of people and the destruction of the environment. In this Year Jubilee we should resolve to examine and get rid of such unjust structures in our society and to eliminate or at least minimize social evils that result from them. However, as we set out to right social wrongs we should do so in a spirit of forgiveness for "all have sinned and have need of the glory of God." (Rom 3:23). God has forgiven us and we should be ready to forgive one another and develop a sense of "social forgiveness". It is only through forgiveness that we can heal the wounds in our society and move forward as a truly united people.

## Uplands and Lowlands

One may not immediately connect the water shortage in the *cities and towns with deforestation in the up/ands*, but in fact *they* do have a very close connection. Forest degradation impacts on *the ecosystems*. *When mountains are denuded, watersheds are degraded* and this means the loss of sustained water supplies for lowland communities. More than half of our major watersheds are now critically denuded.

With the removal of the forest cover soil erosion on a large scale follows especially on sloping land, water moves too quickly, not having a chance to sink into the ground. The uplands make up 52% of the total land area of the county. Typhoons sweep the county on an average of 20 a year. The absence of forest cover reduces the capacity of the soil to contain and absorb the water from the heavy monsoon rains. Generally the land has only a thin layer of top soil. Given the lack of forest cover, the topography and the heavy rains induce soil erosion, mass wasting and landslides. Not only are the watersheds destroyed but also the loss of top soil has serious implications for agricultural and food production. Aquifers are not recharged. Increased surface run off from denuded hillsides results in flash floods and silted rivers; sediment deposits shorten the useful life span of dams and clog irrigation systems. Coastal areas are degraded and coastal reefs are affected by siltation. Increased flooding during the rainy season and decreased flow in the dry season are other results of deforestation. The ecological stability of upland and lowland agricultural areas and coastal ecosystems are dramatically affected. The fact is, the environment is closely interlinked — what happens in the uplands has implications for the lowlands.

The destruction of our forests has led to another great social evil: Numerous ethnic groups in the country have been deprived of their homeland by commercial logging and the spread of

agriculture and the insurrection that followed. The destruction of the forest in such cases is equivalent to evicting people and tossing them onto the street, a stark reality faced by urban centers that absorb most of our homeless brothers and sisters.

## **The Condition of Aquifers**

Due to the lack of forest cover the unprotected soil on the denuded watersheds is unable to absorb the rainwater. This means that aquifers are not recharging fast enough, they are being depleted, and the levels of the water tables are dropping. Those who have studied such matters inform us that this is happening in different locations throughout the country. In one Cebu coastal area and in Metro Manila, Western Laguna and Cavite, a continuous decline in ground water levels has been observed over the past 10 years. In the Metro Manila, ground water levels have gone down from 10 to 20 meters above sea level to more than 100 meters below sea level in a number of locations. In coastal Metro Cebu, due to the continuous lowering of the water table, there is progressive salinization of its aquifer up to 2 kilometers inland. The decline of the ground water level of 4 to 6 meters per year has been reported in the Cavite area.

According to hydrologists water-stressed countries are those countries with annual supplies of 1000-2000 cubic meters per person. When the figure drops below 1000 cubic meters - about 750 gallons per person per day—nations are classified as water scarce nations. At this stage lack of water becomes a severe constraint on food production, economic development and protection of natural systems. The Philippines is fast approaching this stage.

Government has come to realize the sad state of our watersheds, rivers, streams, lakes, *esteros* and coastal waters and is taking steps to address the problem. But there are no easy solutions in

sight and it is going to take time. But how much time *will it* take? That will depend on how we, as a people, respond to the challenge. The *efforts of government can only succeed if individuals and communities* decide to mend their ways and develop a much stronger sense of civic virtue. We need to grow in the awareness that we are all responsible for all. For we are one nation.

In the case of watersheds, communities and commercial enterprises have to realize their importance in our national life and have to be willing to do their part in managing them efficiently. Local communities have to realize that they are part of a national community and that the entire nation depends on the well being of our watersheds. These communities are managing a national resource and have a responsibility to the nation. If the uplands are destroyed, then everyone suffers. Lowland communities need to realize that they have an obligation to support upland communities and to make it possible for them to protect the watersheds. We depend on each other.

In many cases our streams, rivers, *esteros*, and in some cases, our lakes, have been turned into garbage disposal areas. The amount of toxic industrial wastes - trillions of tons every year - dumped into our waterways and systems, is simply horrendous. Some of our rivers are dead or dying and emit the stench of decay. Waterways do not pollute themselves. They have become polluted because of the way people have behaved, because of our lack of civic virtue, because of our lack of concern for others and for the health of our environment. We have no excuses. We have no one to blame. Unless we change our ways and attitudes, then things are not going to improve.

## THE COMMUNITY OF ACTION

### The Laity

What are we to do about the situation? This has frequently been called the age of the laity. *Ecclesia In Asia* says:

The vocation of the laity sets them firmly in the world to perform the most varied tasks, and it is here that they are called to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ. By the grace and call of Baptism and confirmation, all lay people are missionaries; and the arena of their missionary work is the vast and complex worlds of politics, economics, industry, education, the media science, technology, the arts, and sport... Witnessing to the Gospel in every area of life in society, the lay faithful can play a unique role in rooting but injustice and oppression, and for this too they must be adequately formed.

It is not too late to save our critical watersheds. But it soon will be if we do not act. As pastor we want to encourage the laity, especially those with the competence and expertise to take a much greater interest in the environment and in solving the serious environmental problems facing our nation. There are too many of our professionals — economists, scientists, engineers, lawyers — who just happen to be Catholics. What we need are more Catholics who just happen to be economists, scientists, engineers and lawyers, such people who have assimilated thoroughly the Christian view of life.

They would still remain first class professionals but they would see things in a very different way because for the Christian, moral and spiritual vision has its roots in a Christ-like heart; they would be asking different questions and with a much greater sense of urgency.

Lay people live in the midst of the world and their job, their vocation, is to bring Gospel values, Christian principles, to bear on / the affairs of the world, politics, society, economics, the environment the world of culture, sciences and the arts. Their job, their vocation, is to transform the world and this means getting involved in politics, making government function more effectively, working for a more equitable distribution of wealth and opportunity, taking up environmental, industrial and developmental issues, protecting and enhancing the environment. The job, the vocation of the laity is to change structures that keep people locked in poverty, structures that encourage the destruction of the environment. Many of the problems in the environment are complex; good will and piety are not enough; their solution demands competence. The situation in the country, the environmental conditions in the country, will change when we all undergo a genuine conversion in the way we think and behave. We thus suggest the following:

### **The National Government**

The national government needs to review all its policies regarding water and to review the performance of all agencies that have jurisdiction over the care of watersheds, water tables and aquifers. Appropriate structures have to be established to ensure effective coordination to address comprehensively the needs of households, business, agriculture and industry. This review should be undertaken with the widest possible public consultation to ensure that policies adopted enjoy wide public acceptance and support. As required by law, the national government should release the financial resources to LGUs, so that the LGUs can carry out the responsibilities assigned to them.

Incoherence in policy is an obstacle to effective watershed management; it is necessary to address areas of policy conflict for example, in the National Integrated Protected Areas System (1991), Mining Act (1995) and the Indigenous Peoples' Right Act (1997).

These conflicts have to be resolved and much more support given to responsible community management. There are no real adequate alternatives for the 20 million people living in the uplands. Shifting people around as land is demarcated for different purposes is not a solution to the bigger social problems of livelihood, food security and stability. Solutions to these problems are needed for the sake of genuine national development. Serious efforts have to be made to give them resource rights and responsibilities in a manner that does not compromise the rights of lowland society or of future generations. It is not acceptable to continue to compromise the poor and marginalized in the interest of an economic growth that is not shared. For government to rely only on the promise of a trickle down economic growth only indicates its lack of real commitment to genuine development.

As the principal guardian of the uplands and upland peoples, the primary obligation and role of the DENR is to assist upland people. Its main focus is no longer merely resource extraction or corporate enterprise. For the next twenty years the primary task of DENR will be to ensure the security of uplands people and to provide education in responsible environmental management. As the main agency responsible for the uplands, it needs to review all its environmental policies and programs and to strengthen the forest-cover component in relation to community presence and the protection of biodiversity. Vigorous promotion of community-based forest management, a program that has shown significant signs of success, should be developed as the major strategy. People participation is essential. Government should vigorously promote assisted natural regeneration programs, and communities should be supported and encouraged to develop their non-timber resources base and to strengthen our biodiversity.



## Local Government Units

Every town needs to identify a sufficient and secure source of water, and local communities to be made aware of the importance of the area to them, and of their responsibility to maintain it. People living in the watershed need adequate support so that they can contribute to the sustainable management of the resource and to ensure that their practices do not contribute to or create a problem. The priorities of meeting domestic need over agricultural expansion and industrial development need to be maintained. It is urgent that practices of better land use, improved water quality and retention developed in a few years, be disseminated to other areas. Only in this way will declared watersheds be really protected.

The importance of building up the capabilities of LGUs is recognized so that they can undertake comprehensive land use planning and efficiently manage the natural resources of the area. Since watersheds are frequently divided by political boundaries, local governments need to dialogue and establish joint management of resources and cooperate with each other in the interest of the common good of the region. Since marginal *barangays* and *sitios* have now become central to watershed management, they require special attention in the area of basic services and sustainable livelihood. LGUs should also be capable of conducting meaningful dialogues with indigenous people in their areas so that a more effective and efficient system of governance can be achieved.

## Non Government Organizations (NGOs)

NGOs can play a crucial role in helping people to organize, to articulate their concerns and compel government to listen. They can help communities become environmentally literate, focus their attention on supporting the local government in doing its job and in responding to the real concerns of the people.

NGOs can help communities shake off the victim syndrome and help them see that if they are not willing to take a stand, if they are not willing to help themselves, nobody can do it for them. The political system will work for the common good when enough people decide they are going to make it work. Many problems can be solved at the local level if there is involvement and commitment to seriously improve the situation.

The NGO role in establishing a national effort for environmental review and exploring new opportunities and approaches is essential to our growth as a society in responsible environmental management.

### **The Scientific Community**

The scientific community has a major role to play in the rehabilitation and management of our watersheds. Scientists can provide valuable inputs and conduct environmental awareness programs for communities, NGOs, church social action groups, and for alternative and non-formal education centers. It is imperative to mobilize the scientific community to contribute to an overview of the physical, biological, social and organizational problems and strategies of a comprehensive and effective response to water management. Good will alone is not sufficient; local government and local communities need to gain wider experience and be educated in the basics of water management and their technical understanding and social capacity need greater development.

Communities can be involved in scientific projects in the monitoring of the condition of watersheds. Under the guidance of scientists, communities can make an important contribution by collecting data. It would also give communities a lot of confidence to know that they have established links with our scientific community. Our scientific community can provide them with basic but accurate information and build with local skills management

schemes that can deal with the small-scale local needs. The support of the media in disseminating scientific information on the environment and its protection is crucial, and they should be encouraged to help generously.

## **The Church**

The Church has a major contribution to make by presenting and explaining the grandeur and beauty of the Christian vision of creation. *The New Catechism of the Catholic Church* treats of the importance of catechesis on creation. It is clear that without belief "in the Creator of heaven and earth", the other articles of the Creed lack any foundation.

The laity do not expect their priests to be experts in economics, political science, sociology or ecology. They do expect, however, to hear solid teaching on the Christian meaning of life, on the meaning of creation, and why as Catholics when they get involved in environmental activities they are doing God's work. They need to be inspired and enlightened about their role in the secular arena. As the only Catholic country in Asia, the Philippines has to bear witness to Christ and one area where we can do this is in our concern for the environment. If, as a people, we allow our faith to guide our conduct, then we will soon experience the renewal of our environment.

The philosopher, Etienne Gilson, talking about the meaning of being catholic, said that we should be: "Not indeed Catholics, who would wear their faith as a feather in their cap, but Catholics who would make Catholicism so enter into our daily lives that the unbelieving would come to wonder what secret force animated that work and that life, and that having discovered it, they would say to themselves: he is a very good man, and now I know why:

it is because he is a Catholic."<sup>3</sup> People ought to be able to look at the Philippines and come to the same conclusion.

Our social action centers and directors can play an important role by teaching people how to respond to the many environmental programs being introduced to communities. Sometimes the implications of these programs are not understood, or conflict with one another, or need much better coordination. When people are unsure or afraid, they tend to say, "No." In a world that is becoming more complex, a more nuanced and thought out response might better serve their interests. Our social action centers can help people assess and evaluate these programs and react to them in a manner that unites the community.

Our social action centers can play a crucial role in inviting scientists and planners to give a clear analysis of problems. In most areas these people are available and would probably appreciate being invited to share their knowledge.

Our social action centers should take the lead in promoting genuine dialogue over issues that divide communities. A united community is a strong community and genuine dialogue promotes unity. Furthermore, we need to take upon ourselves the responsibility of assuring that our children's inheritance is protected. Many of the problems facing the nation, and this includes environmental problems, can only be solved if we act as communities. It is only by acting collectively, as a community, that we can hope to ensure that our cultural and environmental options are secure for future generations.

The Church has another great resource in the millions of dedicated members of "mandated Organizations" and Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs). They must begin to be more deeply involved in the solving of ecological problems at their level of the community.

<sup>3</sup> Gilson Etienne, 1939. *Christianity and Philosophy*, London: Sheed 2nd Ward.

## Conclusion

To share in the great blessings of this Year of Jubilee we must strive to be reconciled with one another to forgive and to ask for forgiveness; we must remember that the riches of Creation, the wealth of our land, have been given by God so that a life of dignity can be enjoyed by all the inhabitants of our country and by future generations. Our homeland has been entrusted to our care and we are responsible for passing on a sound environment to generations yet unborn. We can be grateful for the keener sense of responsibility towards the environment that is developing among us — a true sign of hope.

In this Year of Jubilee, it is our prayer that our Catholic Faith will take hold of our minds and hearts and become the wellspring of our thoughts and actions. To receive this great grace, we need to spend time silently meditating on the great truths God has revealed. For our minds and hearts to be transformed we need to spend time quietly in the company of that same Christ who was conceived in Mary's womb, who was born of the Virgin Mary, who died on the cross and rose from the dead, and who now in his resurrected and glorified humanity is present in heaven and in the most Blessed Sacrament in our churches.

The Holy Father wants this Year of Jubilee to be "intensely Eucharistic." At the Offertory in the mass the gifts of bread and wine are placed on the altar. We know that the bread is made from wheat, wheat that grew in a field watered by rain from the clouds; the wheat was ground, mixed with water that also came from the earth, baked in an oven and made into bread. Wine comes from grapes that grew in a vineyard; the vines shot their roots down into the soil and drew their nourishment from the good earth. It is important to reflect deeply on this. Christ accepts the gifts we offer, "which earth has given and human hands have made" and the fruit of the vine and work of human hands" and at the

consecration transforms the bread and wine into his glorified humanity. Pope John Paul II writes: "Under the sign of the consecrated bread and wine, Christ Jesus, risen and glorified, the Light of the nations (Luke 2:32), reveals the continuation of his incarnation. He is still risen and alive in our midst, to nourish believers with his body and blood."<sup>4</sup> Christ, the Lord of Creation, takes bread and wine, parts of the material creation, sprung from the soil of the earth, and transforms them into his glorified humanity to become present among us. Our God is truly Emmanuel — God with us.

If we learn to really love Christ present in the Eucharist, then this love should express itself in a deep concern for Creation because:

Christ loved the earth, loved it as a lover  
because it was God's earth;  
He loved it, because it was created by His  
Father from nothingness to be Life's temple."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Paul II, John Paul. *The Mystery of the Incarnation*, quoted in Gift of Divine Life, prepared by Theological and Historical Commission for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Phils: Paulines Publishing House, 1999.

<sup>5</sup> O'Malley, B. 1989. *A Welsh Pilgrim's Manual*, Gomer Publisher, quoted in the Elements of Celtic Christianity by Anthony Duncan, Element Books Limited 1997.

# **Curriculum Vitae and Pontifical Bull**

## **JOSE FRANCISCO OLIVEROS**

### **BIO-DATA**

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FEBRUARY 2, 2000-	APPOINTED 2nd BISHOP OF BOAC
MARCH 20, 2000	ORDAINED BISHOP SAN DIEGO DE ALCALA CATHEDRAL GUMACA, QUEZON
	CONSECRATOR: MOST. REV. ANTONIO FRANCC APOSTOLIC NUNCIO
	CO-CONSECRATORS: MOST REV. GAUDENCIO ROSALES ARCHBISHOP OF LIPA MOST REV. EMILIO R. MARQUEZ BISHOP OF GUMACA
MARCH 28, 2000	INSTALLED AS SECOND BISHOP OF BOAC INSTALLING PRELATE: MOST REV. ANTONIO FRANCO APOSTOLIC NUNCIO

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MOST REV. JOSE FRANCISCO OLIVEROS

## **"Dominus Iesus"**

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### CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

#### INTRODUCTION

1. The *Lord Jesus*, before ascending into heaven, commanded his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to the whole world and to baptize all nations: "Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; he who does not believe will be condemned" (*Mk* 16:15-16); "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, until the end of the world" (*Mt* 28:18-20; cf. *Lk* 24:46-48; *Jn* 17:18, 20, 21; *Acts* 1:8).

The Church's universal mission is born from the command of Jesus Christ and is fulfilled in the course of the centuries in the proclamation of the mystery of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and the mystery of the incarnation of the Son, as saving event for all humanity. The fundamental contents of the profession of the Christian faith are expressed thus: "I believe in one God, the Father, Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen. I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son

of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation, he came down from heaven: by the power of the Holy Spirit he became incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; he suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures; he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father. With the Father and the Son he is worshipped and glorified. He has spoken through the prophets. I believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come".<sup>1</sup>

2. In the course of the centuries, the Church has proclaimed and witnessed with fidelity to the Gospel of Jesus. At the close of the second millennium, however, this mission is still far from complete.<sup>2</sup> For that reason, Saint Paul's words are now more relevant than ever: "Preaching the Gospel is not a reason for me to boast; it is a necessity laid on me: woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!" (*1 Cor 9:16*). This explains the Magisterium's particular attention to giving reasons for and supporting the evangelizing mission of the Church, above all in connection with the religious traditions of the world.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> First Council of Constantinople, *Symbolum Constantinopolitanum*: DS 150.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 1: AAS 83 (1991), 249-340.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad gentes* and Declaration *Nostra aetate*; cf. also Paul VI Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*: AAS 68 (1976), 5-76; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*.

In considering the values which these religions witness to and offer humanity, with an open and positive approach, the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions states: "The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and teachings, which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men".<sup>4</sup> Continuing in this line of thought, the Church's proclamation of Jesus Christ, "the way, the truth, and the life" (*Jn* 14:6), today also makes use of the practice of inter-religious dialogue. Such dialogue certainly does not replace, but rather accompanies the *missio ad gentes*, directed toward that "mystery of unity", from which "it follows that all men and women who are saved share, though differently, in the same mystery of salvation in Jesus Christ through his Spirit".<sup>5</sup> Inter-religious dialogue, which is part of the Church's evangelizing mission,<sup>6</sup> requires an attitude of understanding and a relationship of mutual knowledge and reciprocal enrichment, in obedience to the truth and with respect for freedom.<sup>7</sup>

3. In the practice of dialogue between the Christian faith and other religious traditions, as well as in seeking to understand its theoretical basis more deeply, new questions arise that need to be addressed through pursuing new paths of research, advancing proposals, and suggesting ways of acting that call for attentive

<sup>4</sup> Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 2.

<sup>3</sup> Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Instruction *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 29: AAS 84 (1992), 424; cf. Second of Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 55: AAS 83 (1991), 302-304.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pontifical Council for Inter-religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, Instruction *Dialogue and Proclamation*, 9: AAS 84 (1992), 417ff.

discernment. In this task, the present Declaration seeks to recall to Bishops, theologians, and all the Catholic faithful, certain indispensable elements of Christian doctrine, which may help theological reflection in developing solutions consistent with the contents of the faith and responsive to the pressing needs of contemporary culture.

The expository language of the Declaration corresponds to its purpose, which is not to treat in a systematic manner the question of the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church, nor to propose solutions to questions that are matters of free theological debate, but rather to set forth again the doctrine of the Catholic faith in these areas, pointing out some fundamental questions that remain open to further development, and refuting specific positions that are erroneous or ambiguous. For this reason, the Declaration takes up what has been taught in previous Magisterial documents, in order to reiterate certain truths that are part of the Church's faith.

4. The Church's constant missionary proclamation is endangered today by relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* but also *de iure* (or in principle). As a consequence, it is held that certain truths have been superseded; for example, the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian faith as compared with that of belief in other religions, the inspired nature of the books of Sacred Scripture, the personal unity between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth, the unity of the economy of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit, the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal salvific mediation of the Church, the inseparability — while recognizing the distinction — of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the Church, and the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church.



The roots of these problems are to be found in certain presuppositions of both a philosophical and theological nature, which hinder the understanding and acceptance of the revealed truth. Some of these can be mentioned: the conviction of the elusiveness and inexpressibility of divine truth, even by Christian revelation; relativistic attitudes toward truth itself, according to which what is true for some would not be true for others; the radical opposition posited between the logical mentality of the West and the symbolic mentality of the East; the subjectivism which, by regarding reason as the only source of knowledge, becomes incapable of raising its "gaze to the heights, not daring to rise to the truth of being";<sup>8</sup> the difficulty in understanding and accepting the presence of definitive and eschatological events in history; the metaphysical emptying of the historical incarnation of the Eternal Logos, reduced to a mere appearing of God in history; the eclecticism of those who, in theological research, uncritically absorb ideas from a variety of philosophical and theological contexts without regard for consistency, systematic connection, or compatibility with Christian truth; finally, the tendency to read and to interpret Sacred Scripture outside the Tradition and Magisterium of the Church.

On the basis of such presuppositions, which may evince different nuances, certain theological proposals are developed — at times presented as assertions, and at times as hypotheses — in which Christian revelation and the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Church lose their character of absolute truth and salvific universality, or at least shadows of doubt and uncertainty are cast upon them.

John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, 5: AAS 91 (1999), 5-88.

## I. THE FULLNESS AND DEFINITIVENESS OF THE REVELATION OF JESUS CHRIST

5. As a remedy for this relativistic mentality, which is becoming ever more common, it is necessary above all to reassert the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ. In fact, it must be *firmly believed* that, in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, who is "the way, the truth, and the life" (*Jn* 14:6), the full revelation of divine truth is given: "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal him" (*Mt* 11:27); "No one has ever seen God; God the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, has revealed him" (*Jn* 1:18); "For in Christ the whole fullness of divinity dwells in bodily form" (*Col* 2:9-10).

Faithful to God's word, the Second Vatican Council teaches: "By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines forth in Christ, who is at the same time the mediator and the fullness of all revelation".<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, "Jesus Christ, therefore, the Word made flesh, sent "as a man to men", "speaks the words of God" (*Jn* 3:34), and completes the work of salvation which his Father gave him to do (cf. *Jn* 5:36; 17:4). To see Jesus is to see his Father (cf. *Jn* 14:9). For this reason, Jesus perfected revelation by fulfilling it through his whole work of making himself present and manifesting himself: through his words and deeds, his signs and wonders, but especially through his death and glorious resurrection from the dead and finally with the sending of the Spirit of truth, he completed and perfected revelation and confirmed it with divine testimony... The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away, and we now await no further new public revelation

<sup>9</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei verbum*, 2.

before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (cf. *1 Tim* 6:14 and *Tit* 2:13).<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio* calls the Church once again to the task of announcing the Gospel as the fullness of truth: "In this definitive Word of his revelation, God has made himself known in the fullest possible way. He has revealed to mankind who he is. This definitive self-revelation of God is the fundamental reason why the Church is missionary by her very nature. She cannot do other than proclaim the Gospel, that is, the fullness of the truth which God has enabled us to know about himself." Only the revelation of Jesus Christ, therefore, "introduces into our history a universal and ultimate truth which stirs the human mind to ceaseless effort".<sup>12</sup>

6. Therefore, the theory of the limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found in other religions, is contrary to the Church's faith. Such a position would claim to be based on the notion that the truth about God cannot be grasped and manifested in its globality and completeness by any historical religion, neither by Christianity nor by Jesus Christ.

Such a position is in radical contradiction with the foregoing statements of Catholic faith according to which the full and complete revelation of the salvific mystery of God is given in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the words, deeds, and entire historical event of Jesus, though limited as human realities, have nevertheless the divine Person of the Incarnate Word, "true God and true man" <sup>13</sup> as their subject. For this reason, they possess in themselves the

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

" John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 5.

<sup>12</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Council of Chalcedon, *Symbolum Chalcedonense*: DS 301: cf. St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 54, 3: SC 199, 458.

definitiveness and completeness of the revelation of God's salvific ways, even if the depth of the divine mystery in itself remains transcendent and inexhaustible. The truth about God is not abolished or reduced because it is spoken in human language; rather, it is unique, full, and complete, because he who speaks and acts is the Incarnate Son of God. Thus, faith requires us to profess that the Word made flesh, in his entire mystery, who moves from incarnation to glorification, is the source, participated but real, as well as the fulfillment of every salvific revelation of God to humanity,<sup>14</sup> and that the Holy Spirit, who is Christ's Spirit, will teach this "entire truth" (*Jn* 16:13) to the Apostles and, through them, to the whole Church.

7. The proper response to God's revelation is "*the obedience of faith* {*Rom* 16:26; cf. *Rom* 1:5; *2 Cor* 10:5-6) by which man freely entrusts his entire self to God, offering 'the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals' and freely assenting to the revelation given by him".<sup>15</sup> Faith is a gift of grace: "in order to have faith, the grace of God must come first and give assistance; there must also be the interior helps of the Holy Spirit, who moves the heart and converts it to God, who opens the eyes of the mind and gives 'to everyone joy and ease in assenting to and believing in the truth'".<sup>16</sup>

The obedience of faith implies acceptance of the truth of Christ's revelation, guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself:<sup>17</sup> "Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a *free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed*" }% Faith, therefore, as "*a gift of God*" and as

<sup>14</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei verbum*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 144.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 150

"a supernatural virtue infused by him",\*<sup>9</sup> involves a dual adherence: to God who reveals and to the truth which he reveals, out of the trust which one has in him who speaks. Thus, "we must believe in no one but God: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit".<sup>20</sup>

For this reason, the distinction between *theological faith* and *belief* in the other religions, must be *firmly held*. If faith is the acceptance in grace of revealed truth, which "makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently",<sup>21</sup> then belief, in the other religions, is that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute.<sup>22</sup>

This distinction is not always borne in mind in current theological reflection. Thus, theological faith (the acceptance of the truth revealed by the One and Triune God) is often identified with belief in other religions, which is religious experience still in search of the absolute truth and still lacking assent to God who reveals himself. This is one of the reasons why the differences between Christianity and the other religions tend to be reduced at times to the point of disappearance.

8. The hypothesis of the inspired value of the sacred writings of other religions is also put forward. Certainly, it must be recognized that there are some elements in these texts which may be *de facto* instruments by which countless people throughout the centuries have been and still are able today to nourish and maintain

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 153

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 178

<sup>21</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 31-32

their life-relationship with God. Thus, as noted above, the Second Vatican Council, in considering the customs, precepts, and teachings of the other religions, teaches that "although differing in many ways from her own teaching, these nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men".<sup>23</sup>

The Church's tradition, however, reserves the designation of *inspired texts* to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, since these are inspired by the Holy Spirit.<sup>24</sup> Taking up this tradition, the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation of the Second Vatican Council states: "For Holy Mother Church, relying on the faith of the apostolic age, accepts as sacred and canonical the books of the Old and New Testaments, whole and entire, with all their parts, on the grounds that, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (cf. *Jn* 20:31; *2 Tim* 3:16; *2 Pet* 1:19-21; 3:15-16), they have God as their author, and have been handed on as such to the Church herself".<sup>25</sup> These books "firmly, faithfully, and without error, teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures".<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, God, who desires to call all peoples to himself in Christ and to communicate to them the fullness of his revelation and love, "does not fail to make himself present in many ways, not only to individuals, but also to entire peoples through their spiritual riches, of which their religions are the main and essential

<sup>23</sup> Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 2 cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad gentes*, 9, where it speaks of the elements of good present "in the particular customs and cultures of people"; Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 16, where it mentions the elements of good and of truth present among non-Christians, which can be considered a preparation for the reception of the Gospel.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Council of Trent, *Decretum de libris sacris et de traditionibus recipiendis*: DS 1501; First Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, cap. 2: DS 3006.

<sup>25</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Dei verbum*, 11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

expression even when they contain "gaps, insufficiencies and errors".<sup>27</sup> Therefore, the sacred books of other religions, which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers, receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain.

## **H. THE INCARNATE LOGOS AND THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE WORK OF SALVATION**

9. In contemporary theological reflection there often emerges an approach to Jesus of Nazareth that considers him a particular, finite, historical figure, who reveals the divine not in an exclusive way, but in a way complementary with other revelatory and salvific figures. The Infinite, the Absolute, the Ultimate Mystery of God would thus manifest itself to humanity in many ways and in many historical figures: Jesus of Nazareth would be one of these. More concretely, for some, Jesus would be one of the many faces which the Logos has assumed in the course of time to communicate with humanity in a salvific way.

Furthermore, to justify the universality of Christian salvation as well as the fact of religious pluralism, it has been proposed that there is an economy of the eternal Word that is valid also outside the Church and is unrelated to her, in addition to an economy of the incarnate Word. The first would have a greater universal value than the second, which is limited to Christians, though God's presence would be more full in the second.

10. These theses are in profound conflict with the Christian faith. The doctrine of faith must *be firmly believed* which proclaims that Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary, and he alone, is the Son and the Word of the Father. The Word, which "was in the beginning

<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 55: cf. 56 and Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 53.

with God" (*Jn* 1:2) is the same as he who "became flesh" (*Jn* 1:14). In Jesus, "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (*Mt* 16:16), the whole fullness of divinity dwells in bodily form" (*Col* 2:9). He is the "only begotten Son of the Father, who is in the bosom of the Father" (*Jn* 1:18), his "beloved Son, in whom we have redemption... In him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him, God was pleased to reconcile all things to himself, on earth and in the heavens, making peace by the blood of his Cross" (*Col* 1:13-14; 19-20).

Faithful to Sacred Scripture and refuting erroneous and reductive interpretations, the First Council of Nicaea solemnly defined its faith in: "Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only begotten generated from the Father, that is, from the being of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in being with the Father, through whom all things were made, those in heaven and those on earth. For us men and for our salvation, he came down and became incarnate, was made man, suffered, and rose again on the third day. He ascended to the heavens and shall come again to judge the living and the dead."<sup>28</sup> Following the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, the Council of Chalcedon also professed: "the one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man..., one in being with the Father according to the divinity and one in being with us according to the humanity..., begotten of the Father before the ages according to the divinity and, in these last days, for us and our salvation, of Mary, the Virgin Mother of God, according to the humanity".<sup>29</sup>

For this reason, the Second Vatican Council states that Christ "the new Adam..." image of the invisible God" (*Col* 1:15) is himself

<sup>28</sup> First council of Nicaea, *Symbolum Nicaenum*: DS 125.

<sup>29</sup> Council of Chalcedon, *Symbolum Chalcedonense*: DS 301.



the perfect man who has restored that likeness to God in the children of Adam which had been disfigured since the first sin... As an innocent lamb he merited life for us by his blood which he freely shed. In him God reconciled us to himself and to one another, freeing us from the bondage of the devil and of sin, so that each one of us could say with the apostle: the Son of God "loved me and gave himself up for me" (*Gal 2:20*).<sup>30</sup>

In this regard, John Paul II has explicitly declared: "To introduce any sort of separation between the Word and Jesus Christ is contrary to the Christian faith... Jesus is the Incarnate Word — a single and indivisible person... Christ is none other than Jesus of Nazareth; he is the Word of God made man for the salvation of all... In the process of discovering and appreciating the manifold gifts — especially the spiritual treasures — that God has bestowed on every people, we cannot separate those gifts from Jesus Christ, who is at the centre of God's plan of salvation".<sup>31</sup>

It is likewise contrary to the Catholic faith to introduce a separation between the salvific action of the Word as such and that of the Word made man. With the incarnation, all the salvific actions of the Word of God are always done in unity with the human nature that he has assumed for the salvation of all people. The one subject which operates in the two natures, human and divine, is the single person of the Word.<sup>32</sup>

Therefore, the theory which would attribute, after the incarnation as well, a salvific activity to the Logos as such in his divinity, exercised "in addition to" or "beyond" the humanity of Christ, is not compatible with the Catholic faith.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

<sup>31</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 6.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. St. Leo the Great, *Tomus ad Flavicum*: DS 294.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. St. Leo the Great, Letter to the Emperor Leo I *Promississe me memini*: DS 318: "... in tantam unitatem ab ipso conceptu Virginis deitate et humanitate conserta, ut nee sine nomine divina, nee sine Deo agerentur humana". Cf. also *ibid.* DS 311.

11. Similarly, the doctrine of faith regarding the unicity of the salvific economy willed by the One and Triune God must be *firmly believed*, at the source and centre of which is the mystery of the incarnation of the Word, mediator of divine grace on the level of creation and redemption (cf. *Col* 1:15-20), he who recapitulates all things (cf. *Eph* 1:10), he "whom God has made our wisdom, our righteousness, and sanctification and redemption" (/ *Cor* 1:30). In fact, the mystery of Christ has its own intrinsic unity, which extends from the eternal choice in God to the parousia: "he [the Father] chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love" (*Eph* 1:4); "In Christ we are heirs, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will" (*Eph* 1:11); "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers; those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (*Rom* 8:29-30).

The Church's Magisterium, faithful to divine revelation, reasserts that Jesus Christ is the mediator and the universal redeemer: "The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as perfect man he could save all men and sum up all things in himself. The Lord... is he whom the Father raised from the dead, exalted and placed at his right hand, constituting him judge of the living and the dead".<sup>34</sup> This salvific mediation implies also the unicity of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, eternal high priest (cf. *Heb* 6:20; 9:11; 10:12-14).

12. There are also those who propose the hypothesis of an economy of the Holy Spirit with a more universal breadth than

<sup>34</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 45; cf. also Council of Trent, *Decretum de peccato originali*, 3: DS 1513.

that of the Incarnate Word, crucified and risen. This position also is contrary to the Catholic faith, which, on the contrary, considers the salvific incarnation of the Word as a trinitarian event. In the New Testament, the mystery of Jesus, the Incarnate Word, constitutes the place of the Holy Spirit's presence as well as the principle of the Spirit's effusion on humanity, not only in messianic times (cf. *Acts* 2:32-36; *Jn* 7:39, 20:22; *1 Cor* 15:45), but also prior to his coming in history (cf. *1 Cor* 10:4; *1 Pet* 1:10-12).

The Second Vatican Council has recalled to the consciousness of the Church's faith this fundamental truth. In presenting the Father's salvific plan for all humanity, the Council closely links the mystery of Christ from its very beginnings with that of the Spirit.<sup>35</sup> The entire work of building the Church by Jesus Christ the Head, in the course of the centuries, is seen as an action which he does in communion with his Spirit.<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, the salvific action of Jesus Christ, with and through his Spirit, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church to all humanity. Speaking of the paschal mystery, in which Christ even now associates the believer to himself in a living manner in the Spirit and gives him the hope of resurrection, the Council states: "All this holds true not only for Christians but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery".<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 3<sup>rd</sup> 4.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 7; cf. St. Irenaeus, who wrote that it is in the Church "that communion with Christ has been deposited, that is to say: the Holy Spirit" (*Adversus haereses* III, 24, 1: SC 211, 472).

<sup>37</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

Hence, the connection is clear between the salvific mystery of the Incarnate Word and that of the Spirit, who actualizes the salvific efficacy of the Son made man in the lives of all people, called by God to a single goal, both those who historically preceded the Word made man, and those who live after his coming in history: the Spirit of the Father, bestowed abundantly by the Son, is the animator of all (cf. *Jn* 3:34).

Thus, the recent Magisterium of the Church has firmly and clearly recalled the truth of single divine economy: "The Spirit's presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions... The Risen Christ "is now at work in human hearts through the strength of his Spirit"... Again, it is the Spirit who sows the "seeds of the word" present in various customs and cultures, preparing them for full maturity in Christ".<sup>38</sup> While recognizing the historical-salvific function of the Spirit in the whole universe and in the entire history of humanity,<sup>39</sup> the Magisterium states: "This is the same Spirit who was at work in the incarnation and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and who is at work in the Church. He is therefore not an alternative to Christ nor does he fill a sort of void which is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions, serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ, the Word who took flesh by the power of the Spirit "so that as perfectly human he would save all human beings and sum up all things".<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 28, For the "seeds of the Word" cf. also St. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 8, 1-2; 10, 1-3; 13, 13, 3-6; ed. E. J. Goodspeed, 84; 85; 88-89.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter, *Redemptoris missio*, 28-29.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

In conclusion, the action of the Spirit is not outside or parallel to the action of Christ. There is only one salvific economy of the One and Triune God, realized in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God, actualized with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, and extended in its salvific value to all humanity and to the entire universe: "No one, therefore, can enter into communion with God except through Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit".<sup>41</sup>

### III. UNICITY AND UNIVERSALITY OF THE SALVIFIC MYSTERY OF JESUS CHRIST

13. The thesis which denies the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ is also put forward. Such a position has no biblical foundation. In fact, the truth of Jesus Christ, Son of God, Lord and only Saviour, who through the event of his incarnation, death and resurrection has brought the history of salvation to fulfillment, and which has in him its fullness and centre, must be *firmly believed* as a constant element of the Church's faith.

The New Testament attests to this fact with clarity: "The Father has sent his Son as the Saviour of the world" (*1 Jn* 4:14); "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (*Jn* 1:29). In his discourse before the Sanhedrin, Peter, in order to justify the healing of a man who was crippled from birth, which was done in the name of Jesus (cf. *Acts* 3:1-8), proclaims: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (*Acts* 4:12). St. Paul adds, moreover, that Jesus Christ "is Lord of all", "judge of the living and the dead", and thus "whoever believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name" (*Acts* 10:36,42,43).

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

Paul, addressing himself to the community of Corinth, writes: "Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth — as in fact there are many gods and many lords — yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist" (7 *Cor* 8:5-6). Furthermore, John the Apostle states: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him" (*Jn* 3:16-17). In the New Testament, the universal salvific will of God is closely connected to the sole mediation of Christ: "[God] desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (/ *Tim* 2:4-6).

It was in the awareness of the one universal gift of salvation offered by the Father through Jesus Christ in the Spirit (cf. *Eph* 1:3-14), that the first Christians encountered the Jewish people, showing them the fulfillment of salvation that went beyond the Law and, in the same awareness, they confronted the pagan world of their time, which aspired to salvation through a plurality of saviours. This inheritance of faith has been recalled recently by the Church's Magisterium: "The Church believes that Christ, who died and was raised for the sake of all (cf. *2 Cor* 5:15) can, through his Spirit, give man the light and the strength to be able to respond to his highest calling, nor is there any other name under heaven given among men by which they can be saved (cf. *Acts* 4:12). The Church likewise believes that the key, the centre, and the purpose

of the whole of man's history is to be found in its Lord and Master".<sup>42</sup>

14. It must therefore *be firmly believed* as a truth of Catholic faith that the universal salvific will of the One and Triune God is offered and accomplished once for all in the mystery of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Son of God.

Bearing in mind this article of faith, theology today, in its reflection on the existence of other religious experiences and on their meaning in God's salvific plan, is invited to explore if and in what way the historical figures and positive elements of these religions may fall within the divine plan of salvation. In this undertaking, theological research has a vast field of work under the guidance of the Church's Magisterium. The Second Vatican Council, in fact, has stated that: "the unique mediation of the Redeemer does not exclude, but rather gives rise to a manifold cooperation which is but a participation in this one source".<sup>43</sup> The content of this participated mediation should be explored more deeply, but must remain always consistent with the principle of Christ's unique mediation: "Although participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ's own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his".<sup>44</sup> Hence, those solutions that propose a salvific action of God beyond the unique mediation of Christ would be contrary to Christian and Catholic faith.

<sup>42</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 10. Cf. St. Augustine, who wrote that Christ is the way, which "has never been lacking to mankind... and apart from this way no one has been set free, no one is being set free, no one will be set free" *De civitate Dei* 10, 32, 2: CCSL 47, 312.

<sup>43</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 62.

<sup>44</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 5.

15. Not infrequently it is proposed that theology should avoid the use of terms like "unicity", "universality", and "absoluteness", which give the impression of excessive emphasis on the significance and value of the salvific event of Jesus Christ in relation to other religions. In reality, however, such language is simply being faithful to revelation, since it represents a development of the sources of the faith themselves. From the beginning, the community of believers has recognized in Jesus a salvific value such that he alone, as Son of God made man, crucified and risen, by the mission received from the Father and in the power of the Holy Spirit, bestows revelation (cf. *Mt* 11:27) and divine life (cf. *Jn* 1:12; 5:25-26; 17:2) to all humanity and to every person.

In this sense, one can and must say that Jesus Christ has a significance and a value for the human race and its history, which are unique and singular, proper to him alone, exclusive, universal, and absolute. Jesus is, in fact, the Word of God made man for the salvation of all. In expressing this consciousness of faith, the Second Vatican Council teaches: "The Word of God, through whom all things were made, was made flesh, so that as perfect man he could save all men and sum up all things in himself. The Lord is the goal of human history, the focal point of the desires of history and civilization, the centre of mankind, the joy of all hearts, and the fulfillment of all aspirations. It is he whom the Father raised from the dead, exalted and placed at his right hand, constituting him judge of the living and the dead".<sup>45</sup> "It is precisely this

<sup>45</sup> Second Vatican Council, Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et spes*, 45. The necessary and absolute singularity of Christ in human history is well expressed by St. Irenaeus in contemplating the preeminence of Jesus as firstborn Son: "In the heavens, as firstborn of the Father's counsel, the perfect Word governs and legislates all things; on the earth, as firstborn of the Virgin, a man just and holy, reverencing God and pleasing to God, good and perfect in every way, he saves from hell all those who follow him since he is the firstborn from the dead and Author of the life of God" (*Demonstratio apostolica*, 39: SC 406, 138).



uniqueness of Christ which gives him an absolute and universal significance whereby, while belonging to history, he remains history's centre and goal: "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (*Rev* 22:13)".<sup>46</sup>

#### IV. UNICITY AND UNITY OF THE CHURCH

16. The Lord Jesus, the only Saviour, did not only establish a simple community of disciples, but constituted the Church as a *salvific mystery*: he himself is in the Church and the Church is in him (cf. *Jn* 15:1ff.; *Gal* 3:28; *Eph* 4:15-16; *Acts* 9:5). Therefore, the fullness of Christ's salvific mystery belongs also to the Church, inseparably united to her Lord. Indeed, Jesus Christ continues his presence and his work of salvation in the Church and by means of the Church (cf. *Col* 1:24-27),<sup>47</sup> which is his body (cf. *1 Cor* 12:12-13, 27; *Col* 1:18).<sup>48</sup> And thus, just as the head and members of a living body, though not identical, are inseparable, so too Christ and the Church can neither be confused nor separated, and constitute a single "whole Christ".<sup>49</sup> This same inseparability is also expressed in the New Testament by the analogy of the Church as the *Bride* of Christ (cf. *2 Cor* 11:2; *Eph* 5:25-29; *Rev* 21:2,9).<sup>50</sup>

Therefore, in connection with the unicity and universality of the salvific mediation of Jesus Christ, the unicity of the Church founded by him must *be firmly believed* as a truth of Catholic faith. Just as there is one Christ, so there exists a single body of Christ,

<sup>46</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 6.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 14.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 7.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. St. Augustine, *Enarratio in Psalmos*, Ps. 90, *Sermo* 2, 1: *CCSL* 39, 1266; St. Gregory the Great *Moralia in Iob*, Praefatio, 6, 14: *PL* 75, 525; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q. 48, a. 2 ad 1.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 6.

a single Bride of Christ: "a single Catholic and apostolic Church".<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the promises of the Lord that he would not abandon his Church (cf. *Mt* 16:18; 28:20) and that he would guide her by his Spirit (cf. *Jn* 16:13) mean, according to Catholic faith, that the unicity and the unity of the Church — like everything that belongs to the Church's integrity — will never be lacking."

The Catholic faithful *are required to profess* that there is a historical continuity — rooted in the apostolic succession<sup>53</sup> — between the Church founded by Christ and the Catholic Church: "This is the single Church of Christ... which our Saviour, after his resurrection, entrusted to Peter's pastoral care (cf. *Jn* 21:17), commissioning him and the other Apostles to extend and rule her (cf. *Mt* 28:18ff.), erected for all ages as "the pillar and mainstay of the truth" (/ *Tim* 3:15). This Church, constituted and organized as a society in the present world, subsists in [*subsistit in*] the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him".<sup>54</sup> With the expression *subsistit in*, the Second Vatican Council sought to harmonize two doctrinal statements: on the one hand, that the Church of Christ, despite the divisions which exist among Christians, continues to exist fully only in the Catholic Church, and on the other hand, that "outside of her structure, many elements can be found of sanctification and

<sup>51</sup> *Symbolum maius Ecclesiae Armeniacae*: DS 48. Cf. Boniface VIII, *Unam sanctam*: DS 870-872; Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 4; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut mun sint*, 11: AAS 87 (1995), 927.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 20; cf. also St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, III, 3, 1-3: SC 211, 20-44; St. Cyprian, *Epist.* 33, 1: CCSL 3B, 164-165; St. Augustine, *Contra adver. legis et prophet*, 1, 20, 39: CCSL 49, 70.

<sup>54</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 8.

truth",<sup>55</sup> that is, in those Churches and ecclesial communities which are not yet in full communion with the Catholic Church.<sup>56</sup> But with respect to these, it needs to be stated that "they derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church".<sup>57</sup>

17. Therefore, there exists a single Church of Christ, which subsists in the Catholic Church, governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him.<sup>58</sup> The Churches which, while not existing in perfect communion with the Catholic Church, remain united to her by means of the closest bonds, that is, by apostolic succession and a valid Eucharist, are true particular Churches.<sup>59</sup> Therefore, the Church of Christ is present and operative also in these Churches, even though they lack full communion with the Catholic Church, since they do not accept the Catholic doctrine of the Primacy, which, according to the will of God, the Bishop of Rome objectively has and exercises over the entire Church.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ut unum sint*, 13. Cf. also Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 15 and the Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3.

<sup>56</sup> The interpretation of those who would derive from the formula *subsistit* in the thesis that the one Church of Christ could subsist also in non-Catholic Churches and ecclesial communities is therefore contrary to the authentic meaning of *Lumen gentium*. "The Council instead chose the word *subsistit* precisely to clarify that there exists only one 'subsistence' of the true Church, while outside her visible structure there only exist *elementa Ecclesiae*, which — being elements of that same Church — tend and lead toward the Catholic Church" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Notification on the Book "Church: Charism and Power" by Father Leonardo Boff*: AAS 77 [1985], 756-762).

<sup>57</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, 1: AAS 65 (1973), 396-398.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 14 and 15; Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Communione notio*, 17: AAS 85 (1993), 848.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. First Vatican Council, Constitution *Pastor aeternus*: DS 3053-3064; Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 22.

On the other hand, the ecclesial communities which have not preserved the valid Episcopate and the genuine and integral substance of the Eucharistic mystery,<sup>61</sup> are not Churches in the proper sense; however, those who are baptized in these communities are, by Baptism, incorporated in Christ and thus are in a certain communion, albeit imperfect, with the Church.<sup>62</sup> Baptism in fact tends *per se* toward the full development of life in Christ, through the integral profession of faith, the Eucharist, and full communion in the Church.<sup>63</sup>

"The Christian faithful are therefore not permitted to imagine that the Church of Christ is nothing more than a collection — divided, yet in some way one — of Churches and ecclesial communities; nor are they free to hold that today the Church of Christ nowhere really exists, and must be considered only as a goal which all Churches and ecclesial communities must strive to reach".<sup>64</sup> In fact, "the elements of this already-given Church exist, joined together in their fullness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other communities".<sup>65</sup> "Therefore, these separated Churches and communities as such, though we believe they suffer from defects, have by no means been deprived of significance and importance in the mystery of salvation. For the spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church".<sup>66</sup>

The lack of unity among Christians is certainly a *wound* for the Church; not in the sense that she is deprived of her unity, but

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 22.

<sup>64</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Declaration *Mysterium Ecclesiae*, 1.

<sup>65</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *lit unum sint*, 14.

<sup>66</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3.

"in that it hinders the complete fulfillment of her universality in history".<sup>67</sup>

## V. THE CHURCH: KINGDOM OF GOD AND KINGDOM OF CHRIST

18. The mission of the Church is "to proclaim and establish among all peoples the kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is on earth, the seed and the beginning of that kingdom".<sup>68</sup> On the one hand, the Church is "a sacrament — that is, sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of unity of the entire human race".<sup>69</sup> She is therefore the sign and instrument of the kingdom; she is called to announce and to establish the kingdom. On the other hand, the Church is the "people gathered by the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit";<sup>70</sup> she is therefore "the kingdom of Christ already present in mystery"<sup>71</sup> and constitutes its *seed* and *beginning*. The kingdom of God, in fact, has an eschatological dimension: it is a reality present in time, but its full realization will arrive only with the completion or fulfillment of history.<sup>72</sup>

The meaning of the expressions *kingdom of heaven*, *kingdom of God*, and *kingdom of Christ* in Sacred Scripture and the Fathers of the Church, as well as in the documents of the Magisterium, is not always exactly the same, nor is their relationship to the

<sup>67</sup> Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Communio notio*, 17; cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 4.

<sup>68</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 5.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, Cf. St. Cyprian, *De Dominica oratione* 23: CCSL 3A, 105.

<sup>71</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 3.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 9; cf. also the prayer addressed to God found in the *Didache* 9, 4: SC 248, 176: "May the Church be gathered from the ends of the earth into your kingdom" and *ibid.* 10, 5: SC 248, 180: "Remember, Lord, your Church... and, made holy, gather her together from the four winds into your kingdom which you have prepared for her".

Church, which is a mystery that cannot be totally contained by a human concept. Therefore, there can be various theological explanations of these terms. However, none of these possible explanations can deny or empty in any way the intimate connection between Christ, the kingdom, and the Church. In fact, the kingdom of God which we know from revelation, "cannot be detached either from Christ or from the Church... If the kingdom is separated from Jesus, it is no longer the kingdom of God which he revealed. The result is a distortion of the meaning of the kingdom, which runs the risk of being transformed into a purely human or ideological goal and a distortion of the identity of Christ, who no longer appears as the Lord to whom everything must one day be subjected (cf. *1 Cor* 15:27). Likewise, one may not separate the kingdom from the Church. It is true that the Church is not an end unto herself, since she is ordered toward the kingdom of God, of which she is the seed, sign and instrument. Yet, while remaining distinct from Christ and the kingdom, the Church is indissolubly united to both".<sup>73</sup>

19. To state the inseparable relationship between Christ and the kingdom is not to overlook the fact that the kingdom of God — even if considered in its historical phase — is not identified with the Church in her visible and social reality. In fact, "the action of Christ and the Spirit outside the Church's visible boundaries" must not be excluded.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, one must also bear in mind "that "the kingdom is the concern of everyone: individuals, society and the world. Working for the kingdom means acknowledging and promoting God's activity, which is present in human history and

" John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 18; cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, 17; *L'Osservatore Romano* (November 7, 1999). The kingdom is so inseparable from Christ that, in a certain sense, it is identified with him (cf. Origen, *In Mt. Horn.*, 14. 7: PG 13, 1197; Tertullian, *Adversus Marcionem*, IV. 33, 8: CCSL 1, 634).

<sup>74</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 18.

transforms it. Building the kingdom means working for liberation from evil in all its forms. In a word, the kingdom of God is the manifestation and the realization of God's plan of salvation in all its fullness".<sup>75</sup>

In considering the relationship between the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the Church, it is necessary to avoid one-sided accentuations, as is the case with those "conceptions which deliberately emphasize the kingdom and which describe themselves as "kingdom centred." They stress the image of a Church which is not concerned about herself, but which is totally concerned with bearing witness to and serving the kingdom. It is a "Church for others," just as Christ is the "man for others"... Together with positive aspects, these conceptions often reveal negative aspects as well. First, they are silent about Christ: the kingdom of which they speak is "theocentrically" based, since, according to them, Christ cannot be understood by those who lack Christian faith, whereas different peoples, cultures, and religions are capable of finding common ground in the one divine reality, by whatever name it is called. For the same reason, they put great stress on the mystery of creation, which is reflected in the diversity of cultures and beliefs, but they keep silent about the mystery of redemption. Furthermore, the kingdom, as they understand it, ends up either leaving very little room for the Church or undervaluing the Church in reaction to a presumed "ecclesiocentrism" of the past and because they consider the Church herself only a sign, for that matter a sign not without ambiguity".<sup>76</sup> These theses are contrary to Catholic faith because they deny the unicity of the relationship which Christ and the Church have with the kingdom of God.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

## VI. THE CHURCH AND THE OTHER RELIGIONS IN RELATION TO SALVATION

20. From what has been stated above, some points follow that are necessary for theological reflection as it explores the relationship of the Church and the other religions to salvation.

Above all else, it must be *firmly believed* that "the Church, a pilgrim now on earth, is necessary for salvation: the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and baptism (cf. *Mk* 16:16; *Jn* 3:5), and thereby affirmed at the same time the necessity of the Church which men enter through baptism as through a door".<sup>77</sup> This doctrine must not be set against the universal salvific will of God (cf. / *Tim* 2:4); "it is necessary to keep these two truths together, namely, the real possibility of salvation in Christ for all mankind and the necessity of the Church for this salvation".<sup>78</sup>

The Church is the "universal sacrament of salvation",<sup>79</sup> since, united always in a mysterious way to the Saviour Jesus Christ, her Head, and subordinated to him, she has, in God's plan, an indispensable relationship with the salvation of every human being.<sup>80</sup> For those who are not formally and visibly members of the Church, "salvation in Christ is accessible by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church, but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation. This grace comes from Christ; it is the result of his

<sup>77</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 14; cf. Decree *Ad gentes*, 7; Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 3.

<sup>78</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 9; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 846-847.

<sup>79</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 48.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. St. Cyprian, *De catholicae Ecclesiae unitate*, 6: CCL 3, 253-254; St. Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses*, III, 24, 1: SC 211, 472-474.



sacrifice and is communicated by the Holy Spirit";<sup>81</sup> it has a relationship with the Church, which "according to the plan of the Father, has her origin in the mission of the Son and the Holy Spirit".<sup>82</sup>

21. With respect to the way in which the salvific grace of God — which is always given by means of Christ in the Spirit and has a mysterious relationship to the Church — comes to individual non-Christians, the Second Vatican Council limited itself to the statement that God bestows it "in ways known to himself".<sup>83</sup> Theologians are seeking to understand this question more fully. Their work is to be encouraged, since it is certainly useful for understanding better God's salvific plan and the ways in which it is accomplished. However, from what has been stated above about the mediation of Jesus Christ and the "unique and special relationship"<sup>84</sup> which the Church has with the kingdom of God among men — which in substance is the universal kingdom of Christ the Saviour — it is clear that it would be contrary to the faith to consider the Church as *one way* of salvation alongside those constituted by the other religions, seen as complementary to the Church or substantially equivalent to her, even if these are said to be converging with the Church toward the eschatological kingdom of God.

Certainly, the various religious traditions contain and offer religious elements which come from God,<sup>85</sup> and which are part of

<sup>81</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad gentes*, 2. The famous formula *extra Ecclesiam nullus omnino salvatur* is to be interpreted in this sense (cf. Fourth Lateran Council, Cap. 1. *De fide catholica*: DS 802). Cf. also the *Letter of the Holy Office to the Archbishop of Boston*: DS 3866-3872.

<sup>83</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad gentes*, 7.

<sup>84</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 18.

<sup>85</sup> These are the seeds of the divine Word (*semina Verbi*), which the Church recognizes with joy and respect (cf. Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad gentes* 11; Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 2).

what "the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures, and religions".<sup>86</sup> Indeed, some prayers and rituals of the other religions may assume a role of preparation for the Gospel, in that they are occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the action of God.<sup>87</sup> One cannot attribute to these, however, a divine origin or an *ex opere operato* salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors (cf. 1 Cor 10:20-21), constitute an obstacle to salvation.<sup>89</sup>

22. With the coming of the Saviour Jesus Christ, God has willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument for the salvation of *all* humanity (cf. Acts 17:30-31).<sup>90</sup> This truth of faith does not lessen the sincere respect which the Church has for the religions of the world, but at the same time, it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism "characterized by a religious relativism which leads to the belief that "one religion is as good as another".<sup>91</sup> If it is true that the followers of other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that *objectively speaking* they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.<sup>92</sup> However, "all the children of the Church should nevertheless remember that their exalted condition results, not from their own merits, but from the grace of Christ. If they fail to respond in

"John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 29.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. *ibid.*; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 843.

<sup>M</sup> Cf. Council of Trent, *Decretum de sacramentis*, can. 8, *de sacramentis in genere*: DS 1608.

\*\* Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 55.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 17; John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 11.

<sup>91</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 36.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Pius XII, Encyclical Letter *Mystici corporis*: DS 3821.

thought, word, and deed to that grace, not only shall they not be saved, but they shall be more severely judged".<sup>93</sup> One understands then that, following the Lord's command (cf. *Mt* 28:19-20) and as a requirement of her love for all people, the Church "proclaims and is in duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life (*Jn* 14:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (cf. *2 Cor* 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life".<sup>94</sup>

In inter-religious dialogue as well, the mission *ad gentes* "today as always retains its full force and necessity".<sup>95</sup> "Indeed, God 'desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth' (*1 Tim* 2:4); that is, God wills the salvation of everyone through the knowledge of the truth. Salvation is found in the truth. Those who obey the promptings of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation. But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth. Because she believes in God's universal plan of salvation, the Church must be missionary".<sup>96</sup> Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission *ad gentes*.<sup>97</sup> *Equality*, which is a presupposition of inter-religious dialogue, refers to the equal personal dignity of the parties in dialogue, not to doctrinal content, nor even less to the position of Jesus Christ — who is God himself made man — in relation to the founders of the other religions. Indeed, the Church, guided by charity and respect for freedom,<sup>98</sup> must be primarily committed to proclaiming to all people

<sup>93</sup> Second Vatican Council, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 14.

<sup>94</sup> Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Nostra aetate*, 2.

<sup>95</sup> Second Vatican Council, Decree *Ad gentes*, 7.

<sup>96</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 851; cf. also 849-856.

<sup>97</sup> Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Redemptoris missio*, 55; Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, 31.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Council, Declaration *Dignitatis humanae*, 1.

the truth definitively revealed by the Lord, and to announcing the necessity of conversion to Jesus Christ and of adherence to the Church through Baptism and the other sacraments, in order to participate fully in communion with God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Thus, the certainty of the universal salvific will of God does not diminish, but rather increases the duty and urgency of the proclamation of salvation and of conversion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

## CONCLUSION

23. The intention of the present *Declaration*, in reiterating and clarifying certain truths of the faith, has been to follow the example of the Apostle Paul, who wrote to the faithful of Corinth: "I handed on to you as of first importance what I myself received" (7 *Cor* 15:3). Faced with certain problematic and even erroneous propositions, theological reflection is called to reconfirm the Church's faith and to give reasons for her hope in a way that is convincing and effective.

In treating the question of the true religion, the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught: "We believe that this one true religion continues to exist in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus entrusted the task of spreading it among all people. Thus, he said to the Apostles: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (*Mt* 28: 19-20). Especially in those things that concern God and his Church, all persons are required to seek the truth, and when they come to know it, to embrace it and hold fast to it".<sup>99</sup>

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*

The revelation of Christ will continue to be "the true lodestar"<sup>100</sup> in history for all humanity: "The truth, which is Christ, imposes itself as an all-embracing authority".<sup>101</sup> The Christian mystery, in fact, overcomes all barriers of time and space, and accomplishes the unity of the human family: "From their different locations and traditions all are called in Christ to share in the unity of the family of God's children... Jesus destroys the walls of division and creates unity in a new and unsurpassed way through our sharing in his mystery. This unity is so deep that the Church can say with Saint Paul: "You are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are saints and members of the household of God (Eph 2:19)." <sup>102</sup>

<sup>100</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Fides et ratio*, 15.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

# **Interreligious Meeting In Jerusalem\***

## **JOHN PAUL II**

Distinguished Jewish, Christian and Muslim Representatives,

1. In this year of the Two Thousandth Anniversary of the Birth of Jesus Christ, I am truly happy to be able to fulfill my long-cherished wish to make a journey through the geography of salvation history. I am deeply moved as I follow in the footsteps of the countless pilgrims who before me have prayed in the Holy Places connected with God's interventions. I am fully conscious that this Land is Holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims. Therefore my visit would have been incomplete without this meeting with you, distinguished religious leaders. Thank you for the support which your presence here this evening gives to the hope and conviction of so many people that we are indeed entering a new era of interreligious dialogue.

We are conscious that closer ties among all believers are a necessary and urgent condition for securing a more just and peaceful world. For all of us Jerusalem, as its name indicates, is the "City of Peace". Perhaps no other place in the world communicates the sense of transcendence and divine election that

\* Address of John Paul II at the Notre Dame Pontifical Institute, Jerusalem, 23 March 2000.

we perceive in her stones and monuments, and in the witness of the three religions living side by side within her walls. Not everything has been or will be easy in this co-existence. But we must find in our respective religious traditions the wisdom and the superior motivation to ensure the triumph of mutual understanding and cordial respect.

2. We all agree that religion must be genuinely centred on God, and that our first religious duty is adoration, praise and thanksgiving. The opening sura of the Quran makes this clear: "Praise be to God, the Lord of the Universe" (Quran, 1:1). In the inspired songs of the Bible we hear this universal call: "Let everything that breathes give praise to the Lord! Alleluia!" (Ps 150:6). And in the Gospel we read that when Jesus was born the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest heaven (Lk 2:14). In our times, when many are tempted to run their affairs without any reference to God, the call to acknowledge the Creator of the universe and the Lord of history is essential in ensuring the well-being of individuals and the proper development of society.

3. If it is authentic, devotion to God necessarily involves attention to our fellow human beings. As members of the one human family and as God's beloved children, we have duties towards one another which, as believers, we cannot ignore. One of the first disciples of Jesus wrote: "If any one says, 'I love God', and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 Jn 4:20). Love of our brothers and sisters involves an attitude of respect and compassion, gestures of solidarity, cooperation in service to the common good. Thus, concern for justice and peace does not lie outside the field of religion but is actually one of its essential elements.

In the Christian view it is not for religious leaders to propose technical formulas for the solution of social, economic and political

problems. Theirs is, above all, the task of teaching the truths of faith and right conduct, the task of helping people — including those with responsibility in public life — to be aware of their duties and to fulfill them. As religious leaders, we help people to live integrated lives, to harmonize the vertical dimension of their relationship with God with the horizontal — dimension of service to their neighbour.

4. Each of our religions knows, in some form or another, the Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". Precious as this rule is as a guide, true love of neighbour goes — much further. It is based on the conviction that when we love our neighbour we are showing love for God, and when we hurt our neighbour we offend God. This means that religion is the enemy of exclusion and discrimination, of hatred and rivalry, of violence and conflict. Religion is not, and must not become, an excuse for violence, particularly when religious identity coincides with — cultural and ethnic identity. Religion and peace go together!

Religious belief and practice cannot be separated from the defence of the image of God in every human being. Drawing upon the riches of our respective religious traditions, we must spread awareness that today's problems will not be solved if we remain ignorant of one another and isolated from one another. We are all aware of past misunderstandings and conflicts, and these still weigh heavily upon relationships between Jews, Christians and Muslims. We must do all we can to turn awareness of past offences and sins into a firm resolve to build a new future in which there will be nothing but respectful and fruitful cooperation between us.

The Catholic Church wishes to pursue a sincere and fruitful interreligious dialogue with the members of the Jewish faith and the followers of Islam. Such a dialogue is not an attempt to impose our views upon others. What it demands of all of us is that, holding



to what we believe, we listen respectfully to one another, seek to discern all that is good and holy in each other's teachings, and cooperate in supporting everything that favours mutual understanding and peace.

5. The Jewish, Christian and Muslim children and young people present here are a sign of hope and an incentive for us. Each new generation is a divine gift to the world. If we pass on to them all that is noble and good in our traditions, they will make it blossom in more intense brotherhood and cooperation. If the various religious communities in the Holy City and in the Holy Land succeed in living and working together in friendship and harmony, this will be of enormous benefit not only to themselves but to the whole cause of peace in this region. Jerusalem will truly be a City of Peace for all peoples. Then we will all repeat the words of the Prophet: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord. . . that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths" (Is 2:3).

To recommit ourselves to such a task, and to do so in the Holy City of Jerusalem, is to ask God to look kindly on our efforts and bring them to a happy outcome. May the Almighty abundantly bless our common endeavours!

# **Truth in Charity\***

**JAIME CARD. SIN, DD**

Circular No. 2000-28  
20 March 2000

The recent visit to the Philippines of the Orthodox Archbishop of Constantinople, Patriarch Bartholomew, was an eye opener to most people of our country who began to wonder the relations of that Church with our Roman Catholic Church.

Even though the Orthodox and other Eastern Christian non-Catholic Churches are practically unknown in the Philippines, those Churches, of which the so-called Orthodox is the most numerous and influential, number 200 million people and are predominantly in such countries as Greece, Russia and Romania, and they constitute a strong and important minority in several countries of the Middle East. Unfortunately, they and the Catholic Church do not live in communion with each other in some matters of faith and government. Though all of us profess to be Christians, we live like separated brothers of the same Christian family.

\* Pastoral Instruction on the Orthodox Church.

From the times of the primitive Church and "for many centuries, the Churches of the East and of the West went their own ways, though a brotherly communion of faith and sacramental life bound them together". But at the end of the first millennium, due to historical circumstances, "mutual failures in understanding and charity" set the stage for a schism or separation of the Churches. And sadly enough, the ecclesial break has not been totally bridged and healed until our own days. Precisely last March 12, the Holy Father, in an unprecedented act of humility, recognized the Catholic Church's share of responsibility in the disunity and division existing among Christians.

However, it is encouraging that, in the twentieth century the Churches of East and West have been moved by God to exert generous efforts toward ecumenical reconciliation and understanding, towards unity and full communion. Vatican Council II took a giant step towards establishing fraternal dialogues between the Church and all the Christian separated brethren. During the Council, Pope Paul VI journeyed to the Holy Land and embraced Patriarch Atenagoras of Constantinople. At the end of the Council, both of them lifted the centuries-old mutual sentences of excommunication. And after the Council, both the Popes of Rome and the Orthodox Patriarchs have been exchanging visits of their respective representatives on the occasion of the feast of St. Peter, in Rome, and of St. Andrew in Constantinople. And continuing this ecumenical spirit, commissions of Catholic and Orthodox theologians have been meeting periodically to thresh out doctrinal and ecclesial differences.

In fact, there are more things uniting the Roman Church and the Eastern Churches than those separating us. We all recite the same Creed and believe in the same revealed truths with only differences in their interpretation. Both profess a deep devotion to Mary the Mother of God. Both mutually recognize the validity of

the apostolic succession of bishops, the true priesthood and the true same sacraments of both Churches.

Unfortunately, however, in spite of these cordial and fraternal relations, considerable differences remain unsolved on matters regarding the constitution of the Church and primacy of the Bishop of Rome. The Eastern Churches are actually many, and they are ruled by autonomous governments, not one of them being subordinated to the others. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, conceives herself as the Body of Christ, with monarchical structure, the Pope being successor of Peter, the "foundation rock" established by Christ himself and the supreme head of the universal Church. The Orthodox churches are governed by synods and councils, not by the authority of single supreme head. In fact they would be ready to accept the primacy of Peter and of the Popes, but only as a primacy of love and service, "first among equals", not a primacy of authority and jurisdiction.

These and other doctrinal differences of lesser importance have continued to this day preventing the return of the Churches to the ancient ecclesial and liturgical and eucharistic communion. Both sides understand that they cannot be in total eucharistic unity until we arrive at a full communion.

This situation creates some difficulties for the faithful to understand the Orthodox Churches and their relations with us Catholics.

Since the Orthodox patriarchate of Constantinople has just established a church in the Archdiocese of Manila, under the title of the Annunciation, which was inaugurated by the Patriarch himself, people should be aware of the norms that regulate the conduct of Catholics in this regard.

Both Vatican Council II and subsequent particular norms issued by the Secretariat for the promotion of Christian Unity have

established some guidelines, especially regarding two things: Prayers in common, and sharing in liturgical worship.

First, *prayers in common*. When prayers are programmed for unity and for worthy causes, it is allowable, and indeed desirable, that Catholics should join them. Representatives of the Churches should cooperate in such prayers to determine the readings, hymns, prayers, place of prayer and even dresses fit for the occasion.

Secondly and more important, the Church is also in favor of mutual sharing in *sacred things (in sacris)*, that is, in *Liturgy and the celebration of the Eucharist*, **but only if this sharing does not run counter to the unity of the Church or involves formal acceptance of falsehood, or the danger of deviation from the faith, or scandal or indifferentism.** This sharing would be contrary to divine law.

In the Archdiocese of Manila, I forbid our Catholic faithful from participating in the sacraments of the Orthodox Church. Likewise, the Orthodox priest is not allowed by Church law to celebrate the sacraments in our Catholic churches, oratories and chapels.

Since the Catholic Church and the Eastern Churches separated from us are very close in matters of faith, Catholics may communicate in liturgy and sacraments but with certain reservations and under certain circumstances. Communion in this respect must not become a common practice nor must it be done indiscriminately until the Catholic Church and the separated brethren arrive at a full and total ecclesial communion.

Therefore, communion in liturgy and sacraments are only allowed "when suitable circumstances exist and with the approval of the ecclesiastical authorities". And the Church does not permit such sharing in the reception or administration of the sacraments of penance, holy eucharist or the anointing of the sick except after

satisfactory consultations are held with the heads of the concerned separated Churches.

There are cases of necessity or reasonable ground to permit such sharing when it is materially or morally impossible over a long period of time for one faithful to receive the sacraments in his own Church. Such conditions do not exist in the Philippines.

The new norms also allow a member of the Eastern Church to act as godparent together with a Catholic godparent in the baptism of a Catholic child. Also a Catholic may attend the Orthodox liturgical service for reason of public office, blood relations or special friendship, and to read lessons in the same service. However, this attendance does not allow normally the reception of Holy Communion.

Finally, since the Orthodox Church has valid priesthood and valid sacraments, the baptism canonically celebrated by the ministers of the Orthodox Church are recognized as valid by the Catholic Church, and therefore separated brothers joining the Catholic Church should not be re-baptized.

# **The Gift of Mission\***

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## **MARYKNOLL MISSIONARIES AND MISSIOLOGISTS**

PRECIS: Easter week 2000 saw MaryknolPs five missiologists gathered for an extended conversation on mission. They focused their reflections on current realities attaining in North America; however, their proffered insights will likely find resonance in other local churches and countries.

Employing the optic of "mission as gift," the Maryknollers explored several neglected aspects of mission; their overseas experience coupled with sacred scripture and church teaching enabled them to reflectively assess mission awareness and commitment among American Catholics today. The paschal nature of Christian mission became a central focus of the week-long exchange. Paradoxically, for Christian missionaries, loss, emptiness, despair, and apparent failure contain the seeds of a renewed appreciation of the gift of mission. The Easter octave conversations once again affirmed that mission always has a paschal shape; the Easter gospel consistently moves from emptiness to the ends of the earth.

[James H. Kroeger]

\* An Easter Letter to the Maryknoll Society and the American Church.

Dear Friends in the Risen Lord,

We are five MaryknoU missionaries and missiologists engaged in research on the church's evangelizing service in the world's many cultures. Local churches in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have welcomed us as participants in their witness to Jesus Christ. During the Jubilee's Easter octave, we met to discuss mission in general and the contribution of our institute, the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America, to that endeavor. In the course of our conversations, we decided to compose and send you the following reflection on mission.

As late as the beginning of the last century, the Holy See considered the United States a "mission territory" directly dependent on its missionary offices. In 1908, however, Pope St. Pius X recognized the maturity of the church in the US and ended that designation. Out of gratitude for the missionary service the American Catholic community had received, our bishops decided to establish an American institute dedicated to the church's evangelizing service among the nations. In 1911, this initiative gave rise to MaryknoU, the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America.

As we gathered on the evening of Easter Sunday, the story of the disciples and Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35) reminded us that much has changed in the church and the world it serves since 1911. The disciples gloried in Jesus' ministry, but his cross had crushed their hopes. When we entered MaryknoU, we rejoiced proudly in the history and spirit of the missionaries who have gone before us. Indeed, we could have taken the words the disciples used to describe Jesus and applied them to our own missionary forebears of the early twentieth century. Like Jesus, they had been "powerful in word and deed" (Luke 24:19). We yearned to be like them: imaginative evangelizers, a strong influence for good in the world. Falling short of our goal, a



confusing emptiness has overtaken us. Many of our fellow American Catholics, and indeed many of our sister and brother missionaries, seem indifferent to mission. An essential virtue for any evangelizing community, love for the church as a frail human institution, has been replaced by an easy cynicism about creed, authority, and tradition. As missionary vocations plummet, anxiety about mission's crisis soars among missionaries. Powerless to change this course of events, many missionaries seek comfort by keeping busy until the inevitable closing of their institutes. Truly, an unspoken grief grips the missionary communities of our US church. An emptiness has suddenly come upon us and, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, we move away from it.

Just as the Emmaus story spoke to us about the present situation of mission, the story of Jesus encountering the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-42) captured many of the themes that emerged in our discussions. "If only you recognized God's gift, and who it is that is asking you for a drink, you would have asked him instead, and he would have given you living water" (John 4:10). *If only we recognized* God's gift in mission. Perhaps the very emptiness that has unexpectedly seized us holds the promise of revealing God's gift.

### **Recognizing the Gift**

During our exchange, several *neglected aspects* of mission claimed our attention. In offering these essentials for your consideration, we do not exhaust the grandeur and gratuity of mission.

**Trinitarian Birth of Mission.** What is mission about if not the entire breadth and length and height and depth of trinitarian love embracing the world? The eternal self-giving of Father, Son, and Spirit takes flesh in every human being's graced need to yield entirely to love. How marvelous it is that human need and divine gift reflect each other! What is true of individuals proves

wonderfully true of whole societies as well. Throughout human history, we find at the heart of every culture such grace-filled patterns of reciprocity as community, marriage, parenthood, and friendship. Each of these social relationships repeats the human need for mutual giving. The church's mission as well expresses this defining human need to be for another.

The missionary Jesus embodies the human thirst for self-abandonment to God our Father. In his Passover, the Father's Word bears witness that self-emptying love makes us finally human. In his cross, God's gift holds out the compassion that makes culture truly humane. Mission, then, is the gift divinely born of self-emptying love for the other.

**Paschal Drive of Mission.** With indomitable persistence, Jesus carries out his mission of planting the seeds of life through his dying. This is his paschal drive, his paschal mystery, his paschal personality creatively responding to the demands of every situation. Thus, the gospel remains forever a story of the Lord's — indeed, every human being's — steadily intensifying paschal experience.

Throughout his earthly crossing, Christ steadfastly moves more deeply into his own human poverty and weakness. The Spirit sends Jesus into the desert, the realm of death, where a frail human being can count on God alone. Exposed to the dangers of the wilderness, Jesus suffers the Liar's distractions. Satan tempts the hungry and thirsty Lord, not with transparent evil, but apparent good. It is only after having endured the desert that Jesus returns in the Spirit's power, enters Nazareth's synagogue, and begins his liberating mission (Luke 4:1-19). Long after John baptizes him in the Jordan, Jesus announces that he still has a "baptism to receive" (Luke 12:50). But Christ's journey to Jerusalem offers no pursuit of suffering for suffering's sake, no blessing of victimization. On the contrary, it is on the cross that Jesus' humanizing love for the Father and the neighbor perfectly unfolds.

Stripped of power in word and deed, the consummately missionary Christ evangelizes by placing his faith in God alone. Through the self-emptying cross, Jesus so entrusts himself to God that the grave cannot hold him.

Yesterday, today, and forever, the face of the paschal mystery is the face of "that Morning Star, who came back from the dead, and shed his peaceful light on all humankind" (*Exsultet*). The Father fills his empty Christ with the Spirit and sends his risen missionary to the fearful disciples (John 20:19-21). Only the one who has returned from the dead can offer the gift of transcultural mission. His paschal disposition alone can breathe life into the church's missionary activity today. The gift of mission has a face. Christ and no other. The gift of mission has a name. Jesus and no other.

**Church, Fruit of God's Mission.** In the church, God meets every human being's need to be for another, to be for God and neighbor. In the church, God supplies the reciprocity that is every culture's daily bread. No wonder then that the missionary Christ, the true and faithful witness to what is human and humane, "loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Ephesians 5:25). Today, in and through the easily tempted church for which Christ died, God shows forth the divine life of self-giving and draws all creation to share in that life.

Jesus the missionary dies out of love to gain and enable the church, which is "the seed and the beginning" of God's kingdom (*Lumen Gentium* 5). Like Christ, the church exists to serve God and the human family. Like the Samaritan woman, the church calls individuals and cultures to meet Christ, to participate in humanity's paschal destiny, and thus to share in divine life. By undergoing sacramental initiation into the Lord's death and resurrection, women and men give themselves to kingdom service with the Lord. They take on the gift of his liberating mission

to other human beings and, indeed, to a cosmos eagerly waiting to share in the glorious freedom of God's children.

**Explicit Proclamation of the Gospel.** In the service of clearly announcing God's good news to those who do not know Jesus and those who hardly know him, Christians join Christ on his paschal way. Once again, we draw from the riches of John's gospel. Aware and thankful for the gift he has received from the Father, Jesus offers himself as Messiah and Savior to the woman of Samaria. Through proclamation, Jesus the missionary awakens the woman to her true self (4:17-18). He frees her from cultural and religious habits that divide the human family (4:21). He invites her to worship in Spirit and truth (4:23-24).

Just as in the meeting between the missionary Jesus and the Samaritan woman, the gift of proclamation affords the primary means for awakening women and men to their deepest thirst, their need to be for another in a paschal way. Through proclamation, the baptized enable others to encounter Jesus, to know God's saving plan in Christ, and to give themselves to the Risen Lord and his church. To be sure, proclamation is not exclusively unilateral action. The meeting of Jesus and the Samaritan woman unfolds in a spirited exchange. Proclamation proves to be similarly reciprocal. As the Holy Father reminds us in his encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (2): "Faith is strengthened when it is given to others!"

**Conversion: Embracing Trinitarian Love in the Church.** Jesus respectfully calls others to give of self as he did. His way is a grisly cross-shaped Passover through death to world-transforming life. God has created each one of us for conversion leading to baptism in the Lord's death and resurrection. Why? Because incorporation into the body of Christ answers fully the human being's inherent paschal quest for meaning. Christian initiation gives definitive expression to every person's thirst to offer self to God and neighbor. Consequently, Christ's paschal surrender

remains forever the gospel's appeal and the church's true attraction. Humanity's religious history offers us many candidates as saviors. However, who among them has addressed our search for meaning and hope more deeply than Christ-crucified who gave himself over to the mystery of God and rose from despair to speak of peace and fearlessness? It is precisely in the gift of conversion and Christian initiation that Jesus gives us a share in his own self-gift to the Father.

In attending to the five *neglected aspects* of mission that we have just mentioned, we do not mean to slight other fundamental elements of evangelization. Rather, we believe that if we fix on what has been overlooked, we may recognize more clearly the whole gift of mission with its indispensable and interconnected parts. If there can be no gift without Trinity, paschal mystery, church, proclamation and conversion, so can there be no gift without witness in the affairs of daily life, worship, a commitment to the global common good, and attentive dialogue with sisters and brothers of other faiths. If only we recognized God's gift in all its wonderful complexity!

To summarize, mission incomparably shows us that everything is gift. Truly, mission names the entire sweep of divine love. It identifies the course, the drive, and the constancy of God's presence throughout the breadth of our groaning, agonized creation. By his paschal gift of self in Galilee and Jerusalem, Jesus wins his church, a communion vulnerable to pessimism and institutionalism. In its service of evangelizing those who do not know Christ and those who know of him only through a proclamation that falls short of the gospel's richness, the church struggles to keep faith with the Lord. Proclamation thus endures as union with the Word from whose wounded side flows true worship in Spirit and truth. By offering all the gift of conversion sealed in Christian initiation, the church carries out the work of redemption until the Lord's return. From baptism comes streams of living water, an abundance of

prayer, witness, solidarity with the poor and oppressed, inculturation, and the dialogical search for "seeds of the Word."

### **Receiving the Gift**

In their conversation, Jesus draws the woman of Samaria out of herself. She receives this gift in a fitting manner. How does she respond? She goes off to town and invites others to come and see the gift. Like the woman of Samaria, American Catholics have come to know Jesus Christ and have offered him to others. Generations of American Catholics have received the gift of mission in a way that fits this divine work. Millions, many of them poor and newly arrived in this land, have generously reached out to neighbors on other continents. Thousands have given themselves overseas as missionary religious and clergy. In recent times, increasing numbers of lay men and women have taken on the ecclesial ministry of missionary. Mission education and promotion have flourished in parishes throughout our country. Many Americans have given heroic missionary witness. As Maryknollers, we recall with satisfaction the paschal service of Francis X. Ford and Patrick Byrne. Like Christ, they loved the church and gave themselves for her. The faith of American Catholics has brought millions throughout the world to the knowledge and love of God in Jesus Christ.

Just as there is a fitting manner in which to receive a gift, so is there an inappropriate reception of the Lord's favor. In his encyclical letter on mission, *Redemptoris Missio* (2), John Paul II comments on a common response to mission that is incompatible with this gift:

[Today] there is an undeniable negative tendency.... Missionary activity specifically directed 'to the nations' ... appears to be waning.... Difficulties both internal and external have weakened the Church's missionary thrust toward non-Christians, a fact which must arouse

concern among all who believe in Christ. For in the Church's history, missionary drive has always been a sign of vitality, just as its lessening is a sign of a crisis in faith.

We must resist idealizing the past just as we must strive against condemning the present. Impartial historians can point to many occasions when the church failed to receive the gift of mission. Today, objective observers find abundant examples of that gift faithfully and joyfully received. However, at the present time new forms of suspicion, misunderstanding, and indifference often obscure the gift of mission. Tragically, many within the general Catholic population and within missionary institutes associate mission with a violation of the other, a belittling of another's religion or culture, and the exaltation of a sinful institutional church whose doctrines, social structures, and traditions contradict the gospel. On occasion, missionaries express fear about inviting others to enter the Catholic Church. The steady decline in the numbers of American Catholics choosing to serve as missionaries reflects a widespread weakening of faith in our community. Some argue that North Atlantic culture closes our hearts to the gift of mission. There are powerful habits of behavior and thinking in our society that block the path to mission: for example, addictive consumerism, the popular belief that personal good behavior defines religion, a pervasive and bland spirituality of individual growth and enrichment, and the dominant intellectual creed that all religions are equally useful or equally useless. Some American clergy and religious marginalize mission by reducing the church's ministry to care of the Catholic faithful. Finally, what is perhaps the most attractive and harmful misconception about mission has many advocates within the church itself. Many American missionaries, including Maryknoll missionaries, look on mission as almost entirely a matter of doing good things for poor and

oppressed people overseas. Thus, temptations both inside and outside the church keep us from receiving the gift of mission.

Again, we return to the story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman. In their conversation, Jesus discloses the woman's real situation for her. He says to her, "You are right in saying you have no husband" (John 4:17). Self-recognition brings the Samaritan woman to mission. She cares that others do not know the Christ. Therefore, she enters the town and invites others to "Come and see someone who told me everything that I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" (John 4:29). In searching for the truth about ourselves, we too may find our way on mission's path. Therefore, during our Easter week of conversations about mission, we used the following questions as a way of evaluating our own reception of God's gift in mission. Do I care that others do not know Jesus who gives meaning to our suffering? Am I disturbed that others cannot know him in the church, the community of his disciples? These questions are for us all.

### **Offering the Gift**

In the fourth chapter of his gospel, John recounts how Jesus brings forth an evangelizer and opens a way for evangelization. Personal identity proves to be the pivotal factor in both the birth of an evangelizer and the creation of a mission method. Through the proclamation of Jesus, the woman of Samaria moves from denying to acknowledging her emptiness. This conversion makes her an evangelizer.

When Jesus asks about the Samaritan's husband, she replies: "I have no husband." Jesus then builds on the woman's careful honesty and draws out her true identity: "You are right in saying you have no husband.... The fact is you have had five, and the man you are living with now is not your husband" (John 4:17-18). The woman's life story tells of empty excess. Devoid of commitment, lacking in trust, without stability, any portrait of this



future evangelizer would be no pretty picture. Surely, it would not be the expected self-portrait for an applicant to a missionary institute.

The conversation about identity continues. The Samaritan woman says to Jesus: "I know there is a Messiah coming.... When he comes, he will tell us everything." Jesus then proclaims: "I who speak to you am he" (John 4:25-26). After that, the woman goes off to town. There she proclaims the news about Jesus precisely by reminding everyone of exactly who she herself is by saying, "Come and see someone who told me everything I ever did!" (John 4:29). By offering the gift of a damaged self to others, the woman connects immediately with her audience and calls them out to meet Jesus. Marvelously, the "seeds of the Word" had been planted in the barrenness of her chaotic life. Could it be that others follow the woman out of the town to Jesus because she can speak so convincingly from her emptiness?

In this letter to you, we have referred to a vague mental and moral uneasiness about mission in the American Catholic Church and missionary institutes including our own. Often we ourselves feel captive to this indefinite feeling of disquiet. We sense this malaise, but are unable to identify its source with confidence. In our moments of apprehension, we pray for the honesty of Mary Magdalene. As she stood beside the tomb deeply distressed, angels asked her why she was weeping. Mary replied: "Because the Lord has been taken away, and / *do not know* where they have put him" (John 20:13). Faced with the emptiness of this time, may we have the courage, like Mary, to acknowledge that we *do not know* how and where to find exactly what we need to solve this crisis.

Stripped of solutions, we nonetheless trust that perseverance will serve the Kingdom of God. We look to simple, basic, indispensable things: our need for one another, our need to respect one another, our need to forgive one another, our need to interpret

the other's actions in the best light. With regard to basics, John Paul II teaches that "The witness of a Christian life is the first and irreplaceable form of mission" (*Redemptoris Missio* 42). He then continues: "The evangelical witness which the world finds most appealing is that of concern for people, and of charity toward the poor, the weak and those who suffer" (42). He is right. Such a primary form of witness is unquestionably worthwhile, true to Christ, and attractive. It is absolutely necessary for any authentic effort in mission.

Such good work also promises that we missionaries will have our merited place on the moral high ground. The world routinely takes the evangelical witness it finds most appealing as a sensible confirmation of its own moralistic prejudices. Who would dare to question a kindly disposition to do good and promote the welfare of others? When the missionary Jesus began his liberating ministry in the synagogue, his announcement of jubilee justice offended no one. On the contrary, "They marveled at his appealing discourse" (Luke 4:22). But when Jesus stripped the Nazarenes of their self-righteousness and questioned their attitude of superiority, they drove him from the town (Luke 4:23-30). Whether in Nazareth or on the road to Emmaus, evangelization deals with treasured beliefs about what is unquestionably worthwhile and what unquestionably makes sense. Today when the gift of mission evokes more malaise than marvel, it may be that the witness we missionaries must offer will strip us of worldly respectability.

Truly, witness in a humane cause appeals powerfully to the world; witness in a foolish cause, an empty cause, does not. Whether in the church or world at large, the gift of mission often appears to be a waste of time when so many good things need to be done. When the world's needs are so pressing, why not neglect all that mysterious theological jargon of Trinitarian life, Christ's paschal drive, and an evangelizing church? Why not settle

for the sensible essentials of mission? As the Holy Father makes clear, to offer so little will not satisfy humanity's thirst:

The temptation today is to reduce Christianity to ... a pseudo-science of well-being.... We know, however, that Jesus came to bring integral salvation, one that embraces the whole person and all mankind, and opens up the wondrous prospect of divine filiation. Why mission? Because to us, as to St. Paul, "this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8). Newness of life in him is the "Good News" for men and women of every age: all are called to it and destined for it. Indeed, all people are searching for it (*Redemptoris Missio* 11).

A world desperate for decency welcomes missionaries who fill up their own emptiness with appealing, sensible acts of benevolent witness. But in satisfying the demand for virtue, missionaries run the risk of forgetting that the church and its gospel spread to the earth's ends from an empty tomb. It is emptiness and our embrace of it that can reach the ends of the earth and turn them to Christ.

### **A Final Word**

In John's gospel, Jesus says to his disciples: "Open your eyes and see! The fields are shining for harvest" (John 4:35). As we return to the local churches overseas where we serve, we are thankful for the many signs of mission's new springtime. During our Easter week of conversation, one paradoxical truth became clear to us: What seems to weigh against mission—our loss, our emptiness—is the very yoke that can equip us, just as it did the Samaritan woman, for mission. Christians who venture to speak of the self-emptying Christ must embody in their own lives the message they proclaim. The steadfast servant of God's Kingdom personifies the paschal leader. Accordingly, Francis X. Ford reminds us of the Easter gift:

The hardest cross to bear in life is the thought that we are wasting our time, that we are useless, that the world is rushing along and we, apparently, have not yet found our feet .... God needs us where we are .... We are only too prone to look for sensible consolations in our mission work .... The remedy for this self-centered condition is contemplation and service of God. Contemplation takes us out of ourselves and focuses our attention on God; service of God instinctively issues from our contemplation ("God Needs Us," *Stone in the King's Highway*).

Contemplation of the God who offers the trinitarian-paschal-ecclesial gift of mission draws the promise of service from our emptiness. Truly, the Easter gospel always moves from emptiness to the ends of the earth.

Easter peace!

Your brothers,

John Gorski  
Jim Kroeger  
Lance Nadeau

Kevin Hanlon  
Bill LaRousse

# "Missions" and the Church in the Philippines\*

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CBCP

## INTRODUCTION

*"Go to the peoples of all nations and make them my disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them to do everything I have taught you. I will be with you always even unto the end of the world" (Mt. 28, 19-20).*

Recalling this great commission of Jesus, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines in February 1991 affirmed that the Lord's words have a special resonance for us, the Church in the Philippines, since the Philippines is the country in Asia with the largest Catholic population. PCP II speaks of the Philippine Church as "a communion in a state of mission" because "the community of disciples does not exist only for itself... It exists for the world." (102)

PCP II also reminded us that Pope John Paul II spoke with a special clarity when he said to the Philippine bishops in 1981, "There is no doubt about it: the Philippines has a special missionary

\* A Pastoral Letter on the Church's Mission in the New Millennium.

vocation to proclaim the Good News, to carry the light of Christ to the nations." And in January 1995, Pope John Paul II at World Youth Day called Catholics in the Philippines and Asia to proclaim Christ, his Gospel, his love to Asia. His renewed summons for the Church in the Philippines was in direct continuity with the often reiterated declaration of a *special vocation to mission*, specially in Asia, given by the Roman Pontiffs, (at least) from Pope Pius XI to our time: all the Popes of our time have spoken of this Philippine vocation-to-mission.

Then, in November 1999 at New Delhi, the Holy Father, promulgating his Apostolic Exhortation *Ecclesia in Asia*, declared that the new millennium is the millennium for Asia, when we must proclaim Christ, his Gospel, his love, to billions of Asians who have not yet come to know Jesus.

With the foregoing as context, we, the Bishops of the Philippines, address this pastoral letter to Catholics in our country, as the new millennium of Christianity opens. Our letter looks forward to the *National Mission Congress in Cebu* this September 27 to October 1, which we hope and pray will be one of the most significant events of this Holy Year of Jubilee in our country.

## **PART ONE: THE MISSION SCENARIO**

The Holy Father and the Asian Bishops tell us that this moment of history presents us with this amazing reality: about two-thirds of humanity today, i.e. some four billion people, make up the vast portion of the world which the Special Synod of Asia in 1998 included. Here live four billions of people, in an "intricate mosaic of many cultures, languages, beliefs and traditions". Christians make up only about three percent of this truly immense mass of humankind, only some 125 millions. We could say that, roughly speaking, 97% of Asia has not yet come "to the knowledge of Christ and His Gospel of God's love and grace." Thus the task of the Church in Asia, as she crosses the threshold of the new

millennium, is to proclaim God's Word to Asian peoples, "*to tell the world of His love*". That is, to make known to our brothers and sisters in Asia, to share with them as gifts we have received, the person of Jesus, the grace of His Spirit, His good news of unbounded compassion and love for sinful humanity, of communion in God's own life, in truth and freedom, in solidarity and peace.

Of the 125 million Christians in Asia, some 70 millions are Filipinos, that is, more than one-half are from our country. It is clear that the challenge of proclaiming Christ in Asia is a summons addressed *first of all* to us, to share the gift of faith that we ourselves received. It is a challenge we cannot refuse: surely at this moment of history the Lord is calling us. "The harvest is great, the laborers are few. Come with me to the golden fields of harvest." The hour of that challenge is now. Now is the *kairos*, the hour of the Lord's call. And "the grace of the hour" is now.

We believe that, surely, there was a divine providence at work in our turbulent history, leading our people through centuries of struggle and suffering to the present hour. Through this, Filipinos kept their Faith alive, enduring and even joyful, devoted to the Jesus of Bethlehem, Calvary and Easter morning, "in love with our Mother Mary" (*pueblo amante de Maria*). With deep gratitude we wish to cite the labors of the foreign missionaries who were God's instruments in planting the seed of the Faith among our people. So that now, as the 21st century begins, despite all the forces that have tried to destroy the Faith we have received and made our own, we can yet clearly hear the summons which the Lord of history and the Church address to us, showing us the immensity of Asian multitudes, and bidding us to "*tell the world of His love*."

## PART TWO: EVERY CHRISTIAN IS A MISSIONARY

Every Christian is called to take part in the mission of Jesus, and the mission the Church has received from him. Baptism inserts us into Christ and into the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Baptism inserts us into the Christ-life, calls us to his discipleship, calls to take part in Christian mission to the world in our time. Every baptized Christian is thus called to believe in the Gospel of Jesus, to make it his/her own, to respond to it and to live it out integrally in his/her life.

This call is also a call to the community, which the Spirit of Jesus indwells, the community which, in each one's own place and time, is Christ's Body, the Church. In this community one learns to commit himself/herself to the work of Christ and his Church in the world; one is called to respond to his/her own vocation within God's plan of salvation. Each is called into the mission of Jesus, and under the Spirit, one is invited to take part in God's redeeming work in history. Thus Vatican II (*Ad Gentes*, 2) teaches that mission is intrinsic to Christianity, and that to be Christian is to be missionary.

Every Christian is thus asked to follow Jesus-in-mission. Jesus himself described His own mission in the terms we find in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 4, 18-19):

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me to bring good news  
to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim release to captives,  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
and to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*



Here Jesus gives us his own personal job-description, so to speak; this is his own mission statement. This text is also a basic mission statement for every Christian, because our mission is to follow in the footsteps of Jesus-in-mission.

The "great commission" of Matthew 28: 19-20, the solemn sending forth of the Eleven, is addressed first of all to the leadership of the Church. However, Christians of all times have seen in this classic Gospel text a missionary mandate addressed to the whole Church. It tells the disciples to "go", to move from where they are, to "the nations, the peoples". It tells them to "teach, baptize, make disciples." And as Jesus says "go", he promises, "I am with you always, until the end of time."

Here then are two great mission texts found in the Gospel. The message and meaning of both Matthew 28 and Luke 4 must be heard by all of us, for they describe what mission means for all. Both texts challenge us to continue the mission which Jesus received from his Father and which he hands on to us, for our own time and place, in this moment of human history.

Mission, then, cannot but be "outgoing". It is a "reaching-out ministry": in Jesus' own life, his ministry was his exercise of mission. He went first to his own people to proclaim the message of the Kingdom to them, reaching out to all of them, especially to "the lost sheep of Israel". He went to the nearby towns and places, "so that I can proclaim the message there also, for this is what I came out to do" (Mark 1, 38). But "outgoing and reaching out" do not have a primarily geographical meaning, as if there is mission only if it takes place in "faraway places with strange-sounding names". Missionary activity can (at least in a wider sense) take place wherever one is situated, as long as there is a reaching out to others for the sake of God's Kingdom.

We want to insist that every Christian is a missionary by his/her baptism and confirmation. What we do, at home or in "other

places" at the service of the Kingdom of God can be called both ministry and mission, mission at least in its most fundamental sense. In such mission, we actualize the truth that we are bearers of Christ and his Gospel wherever we may live and work, and that we are keepers of our brothers and sisters in the love of Christ.

Such mission is possible for all, for lay Christians specially, whatever their state of life and personal situation might be, even if they can not engage "full time" in it, even if they have not received ordination in the Church, even if they do not live the life of the vows of religious. The Spirit calls all the baptized to participate in the ministry and mission of Jesus. The Spirit inspires all who will open their hearts, calls them to let Christ enter into their daily lives and activities. The Spirit sets them free to join in renewing and transforming the milieu in which they live and work, and the greater world of humankind around us, — to the measure of their gifts, their capabilities and possibilities, according to the grace given to each one. As sons and daughters of the Church we are bidden to exercise and to share the Faith, Hope and Love that are God's gifts to us, through the Christ-life he has given to us.

### **PART THREE: THE CHURCH IN THE PHILIPPINES — CALLED TO MISSION.**

The Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has for more than 25 years tried to articulate again and again what response the Church in Asia should give to the Lord's call to mission. It is the purpose of the National Mission Congress this year that we, the Church in the Philippines, may gather together at Cebu and undertake a life-task for this *Kairos*, this hour of grace given us as the People of God journeying with our Asian brothers and sisters toward his kingdom.

We as Church are called to be in our part of the globe "the universal sacrament of salvation", sent out by the Lord on a mission

to the whole of the human race (*Lumen Gentium* 13). The Church universal is Catholic because of this mission. But each particular or local Church, being Catholic, shares in the same mission. Hence to each local Church the mandate is also given to proclaim Jesus' message and invitation to give living witness of God's love in Christ Jesus, and to share the gifts it has received from the Lord. For the Church in the Philippines, for every one of our local Churches there is a new insistence and a new urgency to fulfill this mandate.

We believe that in recent years the Spirit has awakened among us a new awareness of the Church's missionary task, and has also poured out his gifts to begin to realize it in — deed and in truth. For in recent decades, a constantly increasing number of our brothers and sisters, — priests, religious brothers and sisters, laypeople, — have left our shores to share their Faith with peoples of other lands, in every continent on the face of the earth. The Mission Society of Philippines has sent several priests as missionaries in many parts of the world. Many Filipino priests, brothers and sisters belonging to different religious congregations as well as diocesan priests are now working in the foreign missions. Several lay missionaries, both men and women, who underwent training through the Catholic Lay Mission Program, are also working in the foreign missions. New movements of faith such as the covenant communities, initiated by the Filipino laity under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, have spread to particular churches of other countries and have surely contributed to the efforts of evangelization of those sister churches. Our overseas workers have in so many instances become missionaries, bringing the Gospel and Faith where these have not been present, renewing and reactivating Christian life and practice where these have been in decline. Through Radio Veritas Asia, based in Manila, the saving message of Christ has reached millions of people living in many parts of the vast continent. May we not see in these events the hand of the Lord, and the movement of his Providence?

It is imperative then that we — all of us — renew our own understanding of mission. We urge most especially the formators of our seminarians, the candidates for the priesthood, to help the future leaders of the Church to develop a personal and profound understanding of mission during their priestly formation. Our young priests should experience life in the missions either here or abroad so that they can become effective agents of renewal in mission consciousness among the faithful.

Mission is the proclamation of the Good news of salvation given by the Father in Christ Jesus. It is about the forgiveness, the communion, peace and hope Christ brought to us for all time, and unto everlasting life. Mission is the sharing of the promise of a new heaven and a new earth, the ultimate triumph of life over death, of grace and glory over evil and sin in the new Jerusalem which will be given to us by God. But mission does not proclaim only God's victory in the life to come, but also the redemption of time and history in the cross and resurrection of Jesus. Mission is about the presence and action of the power of the Spirit of Jesus in the struggle against sinfulness in the heart of humanity, in individual lives and in the relationships and structures of injustice, domination and alienation which sin establishes in society. In our present context mission will therefore mean the elimination of graft and corruption and the active pursuit for peace. For mission is about creating and transforming communities that shall live in God's *shalom*, communities of truth and justice, of solidarity, freedom and love.

#### **PART FOUR: SOME REFLECTIONS ON OUR CALL TO MISSION.**

*1. The Mission of Jesus:* Since Christian mission is a "following in the footsteps of Jesus", we need to return to the person and ministry of Jesus as the Gospels reveal him to us. If we lose sight of Jesus, we may lose our way. Perhaps we may

simply remember that Jesus' mission was rooted in his "incredible intimacy" with *Abba*, his Father. All mission begins in that experience of *Abba*, in that unique relationship of Jesus with his Father in heaven. It is there, then, in our own relationship with the Father, that our mission is rooted; we may never forget this. This is one reason why *prayer is itself the fountainhead of mission*.

Jesus, "the one sent by the Father," (cf John 4,34; 20,21) is the first missionary. His mission is, under the Spirit's guidance, constantly concerned with the concrete needs of people's real lives. (Cf. Luke 4, 16-19) Then, we are not to forget that Jesus' major attention was focused on the formation of his disciples. As we read the Gospels we realize that in a true sense this seemed to be his over-riding, even his primary concern. It tells us that we are also called to give primacy to formation for mission, not only for those who will "go abroad", but for all of us who will "stay at home". We must form *true missionary attitudes* within our families and communities, precisely because for most of us, our very living-out of Christian life, our witness, will be our real missionary labor! Being constantly guided by the Spirit must be a radical attitude in our lives. In choosing priorities for our action, we see that Jesus gave so much of his attention to healing the sick, to comforting the afflicted and the sorrowing, to showing mercy to sinners, to turning to children and youth, to a "preferential love for the poor and the little ones" in society, the marginalized and "left out", for those who were powerless and needing compassion. Mission history's most inspiring pages teach us of Christian missionaries acting as Jesus did, and in our time we have the unforgettable figure of Mother Teresa of Calcutta to tell us that this manner of mission inspires and moves even the most secularized sectors of modern society.

2. *Mission in Asia*: There is a sense in which mission in Asia today will reproduce in a new way the missionary mind and heart of Jesus, — that "mind which was in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2, 6

ff.): the self-abnegation of his entire life, his acceptance — even his choice — of a life of seeming insignificance and powerlessness in the eyes of the world; his acceptance of failure, of the final rejection of his work, offered in self-sacrificing love. Jesus' mission was met with persecution, it ended in suffering, a mission which seemingly led nowhere,— only to the cross. Jesus the missionary met opposition and betrayal with unchanging goodness and gentleness, rooted in his utter reliance and unshakable trust in his Father. Today, in her mission to Asia, the Church will not come in power and wealth. The Church on mission will have to do mission in relative poverty. The Philippine Church, being a Church for the poor, will have "to glory in weakness" and simplicity, so that the real power of God may be revealed. The Filipino missionary will not have great prestige or cultural superiority. He/she must draw instead on the resources, which God alone can give: faith, hope and love, the resources of the Spirit, the virtues and gifts of "the Christ-like God." But such was the mission of Jesus. Let this be a special mark of the Philippines' missionary endeavor, this likeness to Jesus, poor and lowly of heart.

3. *Some Partners in Mission:* Mission, in poverty and humility, following the footsteps of Jesus, will draw much of its strength and power from the prayers and sacrifices of those who will be "stay-at-home missionaries". Here we see the necessary partnership of every one in the "sending Church" with those whom they send. Here we also see the missionary task given to contemplatives, to the sick and aged, to children.

Contemplatives must realize that "the new age of mission" is for them also a new challenge to generosity. Following the footsteps of St. Therese of the Child Jesus, a contemplative, who is declared a Patroness of the Missions, they are called to accompany the many missionary activities carried out by those who will "go forth" on missionary journeys and undertake missionary labors. They must renew their faith that their prayer and sacrifices

can, in the communion of saints and by the power of the Spirit, be of great support to those who are proclaiming the name and gospel of Jesus to "other peoples".

The sick, who offer their illness and suffering for the Church's missionaries, have a privileged part in missionary endeavor. They are, as the Holy Father has often said, "the strong ones": their self-offering and sacrifices generate much strength from "the power of Jesus' resurrection" for those who toil in the Lord's harvest.

Similarly, children — specially those in our Catholic schools — can be taught again to offer prayers and sacrifices for their brothers and sisters in the missions. The awakening of missionary consciousness and zeal among young people, once so fruitfully done in years gone by, can be renewed. Parents should inculcate in their children a mission-awareness by giving them information about the missions, by teaching them to pray for the missions and by giving them the example of giving financial support to missionaries. In this way missionary consciousness may come alive again in Christian families and in Christian schools, for otherwise, how can the baptized learn that "every Christian is a missionary"?

4. *Overseas Migrant Filipinos:* We are also to remember that PCP-II stressed "the missionary potential of Filipino migrant workers abroad." (108) It noted that "the wave after wave of Filipinos [who] have sought work in other countries" have produced witnesses "through their religiosity and piety wherever this is possible for them". However, to be effective missionaries these overseas migrant workers should be first evangelized themselves.

5. *Inculturation:* Our own missionary work must foster authentic inculturation within the cultures of Asian peoples to whom Jesus and his Gospel are to be proclaimed; we do not want to repeat the imposition of alien cultural forms in worship, lifestyle and ministry, as was so often done in the past. Creative inculturation in our own communities will instill *attitudes of that catholicity* of

the Church, which is the source and end term of missionary inculturation. Thus we hope that Filipino missionary endeavor will bring forth a genuine flowering of inculturated communities, alive to both past and present culture, but also attuned to the changing cultures of our modern and post-modern world. True inculturation, our Asian theologians have repeatedly taught, is really the building up of an authentically local Church for its own time.

6. *Inter-religious Dialogue*: Mission in Asia will call for new consciousness and knowledge regarding other religious traditions here in this continent in which almost all the great religions of humanity have been born. One of the "new things" of mission in Asia will be the demand for a deepened understanding of other religious communities (specially the Islamic), their religiosity and their theologies. Attitudes of genuine respect and reverence for others' beliefs and spiritualities must precede and accompany all inter-religious dialogue and all mission. The Church's authentic teaching on the relation of Jesus Christ and of the Church herself, to other religions and their traditions as well as a personal experience of living with people of other religions must become, at least in some measure, part of the Christian formation of Asian and Filipino Catholics in the years to come.

7. *Blessed Pedro Calungsod*: We cannot end these reflections without speaking of the great gift given to our people on March 5 of this year: the beatification of Pedro Calungsod, the young — 17-year old — martyr from the Cebu archdiocese. Calungsod gave his life as a missionary of the Gospel in Guam on 2 April 1672. We believe it was a special favor of Divine Providence that the beatification of such a young person who died a martyr's death several hundred years ago, should take place at the beginnings of this Jubilee Year, as the Third Millennium begins, — the millennium the Pope has called the 'Asian millennium', when Jesus Christ must be proclaimed to Asia. Modern missionaries must be aware that mission work is as difficult and dangerous today as in the



past. Like Pedro Calungsod, San Lorenzo Ruiz, the first Filipino Saint, suffered martyrdom for the Faith. Most recently, Fr. Rhoel Gallardo, a missionary in our county, gave up his life for the Faith. Like these three valiant Filipinos, all our missionaries must be ready to endure many trials and hardships including martyrdom for the sake of Christ.

## CONCLUSION

We have written this pastoral letter as we prepare for the National Mission Congress. This congress will be our united response, as the People of God in the Philippines, to the great challenge of *Ecclesia in Asia*: we want to begin the millennium by pledging that our local Churches will be truly missionary in spirit and in action, that we will try to realize, every one of us, our call to be missionaries, in our own land, and in our great Asian continent. *We want to promise the Lord, that we as Christian Filipinos will renew our efforts to "tell the world of his love."* We invite above all our beloved young people, to whom Our Lord today turns in a special way, to pledge themselves and their lives to give a living and shining witness to Jesus and his Gospel of truth and love.

We end by invoking Mary, the Mother of the Lord, to accompany us each day as we pray and prepare for the Mission Congress. We, the pueblo amante de Maria, do this with immense confidence and hope. As Mary was, in our history, truly and indisputably the Morning Star of our own evangelization, so we know she will go before us, as the Star of the Dawn of the new springtime of the Faith in our continent, and in the whole world itself. To her we pray for all the people of our land, and all the peoples of Asia, "Show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb, Jesus. *Oh clement, oh loving, oh sweet Virgin Mary!*"

# **Religious Life: From Ministry to Witness**

**QUIRICO PEDREGOSA, JR., OP**

## **A Charism of Ministry?**

Religious life in the Christian tradition in Asia today is largely seen and lived as a charism of ministry. Mostly people know religious communities by what they do. Religious men and women, excepting the cloistered ones, spend most of their waking hours in various apostolic works. They are always up on their feet, on the go, busy about doing something. Religious life has become very much ministry-oriented. Any many religious are overworked.

Religious life is characterized by a vast array of services that it provides in the church and in the society at large. With the multiplicity of ministries in which religious are engaged, religious life comes out as if primarily a charism of service. *Who* are the religious? The answer is determined largely by what they *do* for the people. Across the countries of Asia, religious are known to people more as skilled pastoral workers, or competent educators, or efficient administrators of institutions than as spiritual or prayerful persons. It has even become primarily a career to some. To be a religious is to be a professional philosopher, theologian, social worker, psychologist, health worker, pastoral agent, media practitioner, etc.

## Factors

Four basic factors have given rise to such predominant expression of religious life.

*First*, religious life, which was originally a lay movement, has been "clericalized" among the men religious. Most of the men religious today are clerics or ordained. The religious brothers are too few and have become the "endangered species" in religious life. Priestly life is directly a charism of service. A person is ordained in order to serve the community. In Asia, for every three male religious, two are ordained priests. With the immense demand for priestly service in the church today, religious priests are easily swayed towards their pastoral responsibilities. They cannot but live, more often than not, a very hectic pastoral life. The balance between their religious life and priestly life is tipped off in favor of priestly works.

*Second*, since the emergence of the first apostolic mendicant order of St. Francis and St. Dominic in the 13th century and that of the Society of Jesus in the 16th century, the mold and expression of religious life has become increasingly of apostolic orientation. That means most of the religious congregations founded from the 17th to the 20th centuries are of the model of active apostolic religious institutes. Most of the religious men and women in Asia today belong to the active apostolic religious communities. They live lives given to and organized around their specific apostolic ministries.

*Third*, religious life is highly institutionalized. The religious, in their efforts to serve better the people, have put up in the course of time all sorts of institutions of service: schools, clinics, asylums, orphanages, hospitals, training centers, pastoral formation centers, etc. For example, by 1993 statistics in the Philippines, if the religious institutions of service were to be evenly distributed among the religious, every 6 or 7 religious men or women have to run

one institution. With the enormous demands of running institutions efficiently, or of making them viable, the religious are faced with multiple responsibilities and at times with countless pressures and stresses imposed by their works.

*Fourth*, religious life is affected by the predominant industrial and technological culture. In such culture, work is given prime value. A work-oriented mentality is on top of things. Functions come before interpersonal relationships. Persons are valued by the worth of their work. Any one who is not productive or efficient has no place in the system or organization. Worse, a person is at times subordinated to work. Religious life in Asia is not free from the contagion of such work-oriented mentality. To begin with, religious life in the Christian tradition in Asia is mostly of Western origin, introduced by religious coming from the so-called industrial and or technological culture. Some principles of organization and management from industrial and corporate settings have been adopted in some quarters of religious life. A lot of meaning and value to one's religious life is attached to one's work or ministry. A good religious is one who is competent, or efficient, or productive or useful.

## **A Charism of Witness**

In contrast, religious life in the other major religions of Asia is characterized not by ministry but by *witness*. The Buddhist monks and nuns, and the Hindu sannyasis are more known to and appreciated by the people not by what they do but by who they are. Their religious life is not first a question of ministry but of the quality of the witness of life. What their lives signify to others is what truly counts. Religious life as typified by them is a sign to others of the human being's pursuit of spiritual life.

They are seen above all as spiritual people, religious persons. They are dedicated to the search of the Absolute, to the pursuit

of the Divine. This is demonstrated by their utmost dedication to a life of prayer and asceticism. They sit for hours in silence, day in and day out doing nothing, giving themselves to the sacred or mystery, cultivating a life of prayer and contemplation. They live a life of simplicity, detachment, or self-abnegation absorbed in the quest for Truth, Enlightenment. In this way, they continue to give a powerful witness to the primacy of the life of the Spirit, in the fact of a materialistic and consumerist culture.

## A Creative Challenge

Certainly religious life is a discipleship, a following of Christ in mission. It is a life placed in the service of the realization of God's reign. It entails thereby an exercise of a particular ministry, a Spirit-inspired gift of service to the community and society. There is no question that the services undertaken by the religious are of great value to the Church and the world. But, are their ministries the only evangelizing element in their religious life?

The first evangelizing element of religious life is the very signification to others of the life itself of the religious. According to *Lumen Gentium* (n. 44) religious life is gift of service to the Church first by its being an inspiring sign to other Christians in the fulfillment of their Christian vocation. "Religious, for their part, find in their consecrated life a privileged means of effective evangelization. At the deepest level of their being they are caught up in the dynamism of the Church's life, which is thirsty for the divine Absolute and called to holiness. It is to this holiness that they bear witness. ... By their lives they are a sign of total availability to God, the Church and **the brethren.**" (*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 69) *Vita Consecrata* (n. 105) recalls the question of St. Teresa of Avila: "What would become of the world if there were no Religious"? The world would not exactly miss the services, which the religious provide. After all, there are other people who can do them. "Beyond all superficial assessments of its usefulness,

the consecrated life is important precisely in its being unbounded generosity and love." (Ibid.)

In other words, it is the testimony of unbounded love that the world would miss if there were no religious.

The challenge of witness of life is a clear imperative in Asia. *Ecclesia in Asia*, emphasizes the importance of the life of witness in the evangelizing mission of the Church. Christian witness is need "in the Asian context, where people are more persuaded by holiness of life than by intellectual argument." (n. 42) "A genuinely religious person readily wins respect and a following in Asia!" It reiterates in particular the life of witness of those in consecrated Life. "The search for God, a life of fraternal communion, and service to others are the three chief characteristics of the consecrated life which can offer an appealing testimony to the peoples of Asia today." (n. 44)

"The Special Assembly for Asia urged those in consecrated life to be witnesses to the universal call to holiness and inspiring examples to Christians and non-Christians alike of self-giving love for everyone, especially the least of their brothers and sisters. In a world in which the sense of God's presence is often diminished, consecrated persons need to bear convincing prophetic witness to the primacy of God and to eternal life. Living in community, they attest to the values of Christian fraternity and to the transforming power of the Good News." (Ibid.)

## **Refreshing Consequences**

The shift of emphasis of religious life from its being a charism of ministry to that of witness will bring about creative changes in the experience of living it out today. Here are some refreshing consequences for religious life.

1. The methods of promoting vocations will change. People will be attracted to religious life because of what they see in religious men and women, not because of what they claim about themselves. The criteria of admission will be different. Fewer points will be given to candidates' capabilities, skills, intelligence, and talents to become efficient workers in the Church. Rather, more weight will be given to the candidates' aptitudes and potentials of becoming effective witnesses to the Gospel.
2. When the shift happens, the vocation to religious brotherhood will once again be easily understood and appreciated. While the life of religious brothers was erstwhile looked down upon as not that useful and productive as the life of the religious priests, people will look up to religious brotherhood as religious life in its purity and naked beauty without the admixture of priestly life and ministry.
3. Becoming an authentic follower of Christ will take the center stage of the formation process. More attention will be given to effectiveness in living and modeling the values of God's reign in one's life than to the acquisition of required competency and efficiency in one's duties in community and ministry. Deep experience of God and internalization of the values of the Gospel will matter more than getting into the status of a professed religious brother, or sister or earning a degree, or acquiring an expertise. The transformation of one's person in Christ as one follows him in historical life becomes the focus of religious life.
4. Religious life will be oriented more to persons and personal relationships. Work and functions will become secondary. Consecrated men and women will find meaning and joy in their religious life apart from their works. A spirituality of relationships will come to the fore. Positions, functions, and

ministries are in the service of persons and of their interpersonal relationships and of the persons' union with God. Personal intimacy and friendship with God and the quality of love relationships with others will be the ground of person's meaning and joy in religious life.

5. Finally, changes in ministry assignments will then be less difficult to take. Whatever one does and wherever one is sent a person is called to live faithfully the life one has professed. Those religious who get out of work due to illness or advanced age would never feel useless because they could not do any work. Perhaps, they would even feel more "blessed". Now they have all the time and opportunity just to be "witnesses" to the life and love that they have embraced.

Religious life can regain its rightful place among the diverse and complementary charisms of Christian life in the Church when it is lived primarily as a charism of witness of life. If it is to find its home and flourish in Asia, it has to be experienced and lived more and more as a charism of witness. The future of religious life in Asia depends upon its development as a genuine charism of signification, a charism of witness of Jesus' life to others.



## **Cases & Inquiries**

JAVIER GONZALEZ, OP

### Lay Ministries Vocation or Substitution?

*During one of our regular seminars for Lay Eucharistic Ministers, our parish priest kept telling us that "this is the hour of the laity" in the Church and that the presence and the work of lay ministers in the Church are a legitimate "empowerment" of the laity, based on their baptismal consecration. He also said that the lay ministries are a restoration of an old practice. However, in our discussions it often emerges the feeling that the present existence of lay ministers is a sort of emergency situation due mainly to scarcity of priests, which would mean that the "cooperation" of lay ministers rather than a vocation is a substitution for priests.*

*In this context, I would like to ask: "Is the presence of lay ministers due simply to the scarcity of priests? Does it obey perhaps to the new "democratic" spirit of our times? If lay ministries are a vocation and a restoration of an old practice, why only now?"*

*Thank you very much for your enlightenment on this matter.*

A LAY MINISTER

The questions formulated in the lay minister's letter raise a number of burning issues which I do not think can be adequately answered here. They contain some interesting points which should be the object of study not only by lay ministers but by the hierarchy and the clergy as well. However, allow me to briefly comment on them.

### **The hour of the laity**

"This is the hour of the laity!" The first time I heard this phrase was in the late 60's, during the celebration of the Second Vatican Council. Still today, some thirty five years later, this same phrase finds echo almost everywhere in the Church. At that time the expression referred to an incipient empowerment of the laity seen just as a boom, as an emerging phenomenon in the Christian community; today, it means rather an affirmation of something that has already happened and progressively continues to take shape.

The laity, the vast majority of the People of God, has awaked from centuries of lethargy and have started taking active part in the mission and in the ministry of the Church. What was unthinkable not so many years ago is now a reality. In fact, nobody is surprised today to hear, for instance, the expressions "lay ministers" or "lay ministries." Moreover, we find 'normal' seeing lay persons performing various liturgical functions, such as reading at Mass, leading prayers and prayer-meetings, distributing Holy Communion... We indeed cherish the presence of lay people involved directly in Church affairs: sitting in the various governing bodies and councils at all levels; carrying Communion to the sick; serving at marriage tribunals; presiding, in special cases, at wedding and funerals...

Understandably, we still hear different reactions from the Church's various sectors: "This is an invasion!" conservative members protest at seeing lay people 'stepping' on traditional clergy grounds. *"This is a repression!"* some extremist lay voices from

the feminist headquarters complain in anger for not seeing *yet* ordained women-priest around. "*This is a blessing, a sign of the times!*" most people cry out.

Be what it may, the fact is that we are witnessing the emergence in the Church of a mature, well-prepared, responsible lay people, committed and directly involved in carrying out the mission entrusted by the Lord to his followers.

### **Lay ministers... substitutes of priests?**

As said in the letter, the presence and the work of lay ministers in the Church are seen today by many not as a legitimate 'empowerment' of the laity based on their baptismal consecration, but rather as an emergency solution due mainly to the scarcity of priests. This looks particularly true when their "cooperation" implies the exercise of certain offices and functions considered for centuries *exclusive* to the clergy. Thus the question: Why are lay members now accepted to carry them out?

Then, the questions: Do lay ministers exist simply because of the scarcity of priests? Couldn't it be simply because we have to be open to the new democratic spirit of our times? May it be due perhaps to some other reason connected with more effective celebrations or group insertion? All these reasons are right and legitimate to a certain extent, but they are definitively insufficient.

Why then, these *lay ministries*? The answer has to be given basically in reference to the right understanding of the Church by the *new* Vatican II ecclesiology. All ministries are the answer to a personal call, a particular vocation for which each member is uniquely empowered, and oriented towards the same aim of carrying out the mission entrusted to the Church.

**Some** ministries **are** exclusive of **the ordained** ministers, like for instance, the Eucharistic consecration and the sacramental absolution, for which the sacrament of Holy Orders is absolutely

necessary, and no delegation is possible to those who have not been ordained.

There are also other functions whose competence in principle belongs to the clergy since they imply the exercise of the power of governance, but that in certain circumstances could be delegated to lay people: "Where the needs of the Church require and ministers are not available, lay people, even though they are not lectors or acolytes, can supply certain of their functions..." (c. 230). There is more than mere "substitution" here!

Finally, there is a tremendous variety of ministries which are valid options for lay people since they are perfectly compatible with the very laical condition. The range starts with the *instituted* ministries of lector and acolyte, and extends to an unlimited range of functions that cover the different spiritual and material needs of the people of God. Here, the ministers are not merely "delegated" or "substituting" but are acting on their own baptismal consecration. To officially recognize some of them, the Church normally blesses their undertakings.

Scarcity of priests? New democratic spirit? Psychological or pedagogical reasons? There is certainly some truth in these and other reasons invoked as direct causes of the present lay ministerial boom. And though they have the merit of having created the present awareness with the consequent proliferation of such ministries, the heart of the matter remains deeper than those mere external circumstances.

### **Why only now?**

Theologically, there is nothing new or revolutionary about lay ministries. As Pope Paul VI reminded us, "the admission of lay persons to the exercise of certain instituted ministries or functions should not be seen as a novel experiment, but rather as a restoration

of the old practice. For certain liturgical and charitable functions were entrusted to the faithful from earliest times, whose conferring was frequently accompanied by a special rite, in which God's blessing was invoked, and which established the person designated in a special rank or class for the performance of some ecclesiastical ministry." (*Ministeria quaedam*, 1972).

Why is it then that only in recent times have we started hearing about lay ministers and lay ministries? Well, this has an explanation. The image of the Church as composed not only of clergy but also of laity is not new at all. What has happened is that for centuries the laity had been considered as a sort of second-class citizens, paternalistic admitted, with some specific obligations but hardly any right in the governance of the Church. This was one of the factors that accelerated the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, which issued an urgent call for the restoration of the old practice (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 14).

The developments that have so far taken place in this field are mainly the response to that urgent call issued by the Council. That is why the whole matter appears to be a "recent creation." Certainly, the awakening and restoration of the functions of the laity within the Church are something new.

## **Homilies for February-April 2001\***

**MARIO BALTAZAR, OP**

**February 4, 2001**

**Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle C**

**(Readings: Is 6:1-2. 3-8/1Cor 15:1-11/Lk 5:1-11)**

There's a quality, which can be observed in the soul of a Filipino. It is also observable in people other than the Filipino. The reason for this is that such quality was not acquired or cultivated. It is something inherent in the nature of man, wherefore it is observable universally. But this quality seems to be more pronounced in the Filipino. If you cannot discover it in every Filipino, it's because the individual in question has not given it a chance to express itself; it was in him all along.

What's this quality? It is the Filipino's penchant to experience and see for himself the miraculous, the Transcendent, the out-of-this-world, the supernatural. Tell him about such and such apparition, such and such miracle, taking place in Novaliches, in Zambales, in Pampanga, and right away he makes plans to travel, to go on pilgrimage, even so that he can verify for himself the alleged phenomenon.

\* The Homilies come from the book of Rev. Msgr. Mario Baltazar, OP entitled *Treasures: Old and New* (Homilies for everyday, 3 vols.)

It is not because he is incredulous or unbelieving, although there are persons of this type. But so that he may take advantage of whatever physical, financial or spiritual good the miraculous happening may bring on him. If he cannot see actually the transcendent being who is performing the miracle, the Filipino is contented if he can watch the "medium" or the "agent" who sees it all and carry out the orders.

In other words, the Filipino wants to see the face of the invisible God, or the Blessed Virgin or any of the saints in heaven. Actually, this desire or quality is not exclusive to the Filipino. In many pages of the bible, you will read this prayer and supplication, "Lord, show me your face; stretch out your hand and rescue me," or something to that effect.

In the other great religions, you will find their adherents and practitioners showing the same desire of communicating and being intimate with the transcendent or supreme being. So, the desire of seeing the face of God must be inherent in the nature of man because you discover it in Filipino Christians, in other Christians and also in non-Christians all over the world.

If by good fortune and God's mercy you actually saw the face of God, you will have to pay a high price, as the three bible readings of today's Mass will prove. The prophet Isaiah saw the face of God (first reading). So did St. Paul (second reading). Similarly, Peter and his fishermen-companions (third reading). They all saw the face of God. What price did they have to pay!

It was supremely devastating for their ego. Because by seeing God for what he is, they also saw very clearly themselves for what they are. Because they saw how holy and great God is, they also saw how sinful and insignificant they are. It was therefore a humbling experience for them. That was the high price they paid for seeing God. But they were not sorry for having to pay so

much. Instead, they were happy and felt most privileged to have undergone such experience.

Look at Isaiah. In the same vision where he saw God, he also saw himself being purified of his sins and worthlessness. Thus he was being fitted for the service assigned to him as God's prophet. Look at Paul. In the same vision of the resurrected Christ which made him aware of his folly and useless labor in persecuting the Christians, he felt God's grace transforming him into a most dedicated apostle and preacher of the Good News. And look at Peter. The miraculous catch of fishes which he witnessed, brought him a painful awareness of being sinful, but it also prompted him to renounce everything in order to follow Christ and become a fisher of men instead.

Where will all these considerations should lead us? Would it be to continue wanting to also see the face of God, and to pay the price attached to it? Do we want to risk being shown our utter worthlessness and sinfulness if brought into God's presence, whom the angels proclaim thrice holy, that is infinitely pure and great?

For one thing, we cannot suppress this desire, for it is part of our human nature. Was it not St. Augustine who wrote that God created the human heart for himself, and so it will always be restless unless it rests on the Creator? For another thing, the admission of our sinfulness is the step towards our elevation to greatness. We cannot only try to imitate the greatness of an Isaiah, a Paul, a Peter, but we will become like God himself when we shall see him face to face in his kingdom as John assures us in one of his letters.



**February 11, 2001**

**Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time      Cycle C**

**(Readings: Jer 17: 5-8/1Cor 15:12. 16-20/Lk 6:17.20-26)**

Today's three bible readings raise questions that can be disturbing to our pet ideas and convictions on how to live our lives in this world. This should not surprise us because the bible was written to continually question our presuppositions, motives and actions lest we miss the goal for which we were created.

Yes, I think that's just it. Today's readings are a lesson on keeping one's balance, to use an expression in acrobatics. It's always difficult to keep one's balance, especially when you are just starting to learn a skill, like tightrope walking, or bicycle riding. You must not lean too much on your left, or on your right. You must not look down or above, too much but look straight ahead. This way, you avoid falling unceremoniously and with injury. This way also, by looking straight ahead, you reach your destination.

I think life must be lived this way: keeping your balance in everything. Neither too much of one thing, nor too little of the other thing. And look always straight ahead; never lose sight of your goal. Perhaps this is more easily said than done. But it has got to be that way because life is like tightrope walking, like riding on a bike.

Consider the third reading (Luke 6). To be poor, to experience hunger, to weep in misfortune, to be reviled and accounted for nothing, that isn't the end of the world for you because Jesus tells you, "Be glad when that happens and dance for joy because the Kingdom of God is yours." Similarly, to be rich and lead an easy life, to have your stomach always full, to be able to laugh at all times, to be highly regarded and adored by many, that is not exactly a paradise you have gone into because Jesus says, "Alas for you,

how terrible it will be for you when you have all these things going for you."

So, you have to keep your balance; not to be overly discouraged when all things seem to go wrong for you; neither to be overly contented when all things are going well for you. Keeping this in mind, we can now turn to the first reading (Jeremiah 17) which may appear controversial. This, however, should not bother us because as I said the bible is a controversial book; it turns upside down and inside out our favorite theories and philosophies of life.

What is Jeremiah telling us? That a curse is upon those who put their trust in man; while a blessing awaits those who put their trust in God. What is controversial about Jeremiah's statement? It seems to go against everything we have been trained for and taught to values most, not only as individuals but as a community or a nation, viz. self-reliance. And what is self-reliance if not trust in oneself, trust in one's abilities, trust in men who are like us. Must we forever be clinging vines, dependent creatures? If self-reliance in a curse, then where does self-respect go, because these two are complementary and twin-brothers?

I think our objections are wrongly focused. Jeremiah is not against self-reliance taken individually or societally. He is against idolatry. And you are committing idolatry if you put up man or yourself in the place of God. Jeremiah spoke harshly against his countrymen because of their crass idolatry. They abandoned their true God and adored and put their trust on things that their own hands had manufactured.

I do not think modern Christians commit downright idolatry. But we may be guilty of what I call subtle, disguised idolatry by transferring our allegiance from God to theories, systems, ideologies, policies and programs which do not take God into consideration. We put all our trust in them, expecting final solutions to our problem from them.

What about science and technology? Have they not been raised by modern men to the level of divinities, especially when applications deriving from these are made that counter moral and divine laws? Jeremiah is not against science and technology. They did not exist in his time. But if they did, he would oppose the application of science and technology that disregards the law of God.

Finally, the second reading (1 Cor 15) recommends also the keeping of balance in regards to our answers to the ultimate question about human existence. We are born and then we die. Man's life averages, let us say seventy or eighty years. Before his birth and after his death, what preceded and what followed? An infinity of silence, aeons of darkness and emptiness. Absence of life is more a definition of man. Some Christians in Corinth concluded: "There is no resurrection of the body."

Paul countered: "If there is no life after death, if there is no resurrection of the body, then Christ did not rise from the dead; therefore, we lied to you when we preached the Good News. The spectacle of death, because of its appearance of finality, can really topple the balance of our belief and understanding, thus pushing us to thoughts of despair. But we must keep our balance of mind. We shall rise from the dead because Christ has risen ahead of us.

**February 18, 2001**

**Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time      Cycle C**

**(Readings: 1 Sam 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23/1 Cor 15:45-49/Lk 6:27-38)**

Today's gospel reading is one of those passages that preachers are hard put to explain to the faithful, and if possible, they would be pleased to pass it over in silence or at least explain it away with generalities. Of course, that will not be possible, hence preachers must grapple with the questions that today's gospel

reading is raising. This shows how Scripture is not always an easy book and must be handled with all seriousness, avoiding both groundless accommodations and fundamentalist interpretations.

But you ask, what are those questions that today's gospel reading is raising? Simply told, here are some. Are we supposed to carry out literally what Jesus says here? In the first place, is Jesus giving out orders or is he just recommending some options, highly desirable although perhaps impracticable?

Listen to his words, "Love your enemies; offer your left cheek to the one who hit your right cheek; give to everyone who asks you for something; lend everything that borrowers are asking you but expect nothing back. If you were to carry out all the above, where will you end up? I think in the home of the poor, if not in jail or in the hospital, or possibly also in the cemetery. Can you really lend everything to borrowers who would not return borrowed things or borrowed money because you are supposed not to expect anything back? Would you not run away from nor fight back at someone who keeps on beating you because you are supposed to offer the other cheek? And will you embrace your enemy who might just be waiting for an opportunity to stab you on the back or to use a hidden pistol on you?

If you are a bank manager who uncovers an estafa, or a state prosecutor handling a murder case, or a saleslady chancing upon a shoplifter, will you let the guilty go scot-free because as a Christian you are supposed to be merciful, forgiving and loving?

If your answer is "no" to these questions you are right because in those situations you are performing a public office, public trust. So except for these cases, what then do you make of Jesus' words? Would you explain away his words by saying he did not mean to give orders but only laid down options which we can freely take up or not? But the entire chapter six of Luke's gospel, where today's gospel reading is taken, does not show that Jesus is just

giving out recommendations for us to follow or not. Furthermore, we should note that Jesus gave none of his above prescriptions, which he himself had not observed to the letter.

I think a solution to this problem can be found in 1 Cor 15 (second reading). But before we go into this, let me just caution you about misreading the words of Jesus above. Jesus was talking directly not to the general crowds but to Christians who have committed themselves to following him and who may find themselves in situations where they have to lend, or put up with enemies and boorish people. Just because Christians are told by their master to be patient, no one but absolutely no one has the right to steal from them, to borrow things and money forever, to strike them on the cheek, etc.

Now, coming to Paul in his letter, he teaches that the differences in attitude, spirit, bent of mind found between Adam and Jesus (the former being earthly and the latter spiritual) ought to be found also between the imitators and followers of Adam and Jesus respectively. In other words, assuming we are faithful imitators and followers of Christ, we shouldn't really mind being victimized about earthly possessions if the heavenly things promised to us are at stake. We shouldn't be endlessly distressed that our reputation and personal honor is attacked if that's how we can keep our heavenly rights and inheritance. Never mind the things of the earth, unless necessary perhaps, provided we do not lose those of heaven. You surely recall the memorable words of Jesus, "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37)

It is in this light and frame of mind that we can understand why also King David (first reading) spared the life of Saul, his rival and enemy, although he had a golden opportunity to dispatch him once and for all. Not only that, we can now understand why

David could also love his enemy just as Jesus would teach his disciples later on throughout the centuries, and is teaching it to us now his present disciples.

**February 25, 2001**

**Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle C**

**(Readings: Sir 27: 4-7/1 Cor 15: 54-58/Lk 6: 39-45)**

March, which is just around the corner or maybe in it already, means several things for several people. For students and teachers, it is the month of examinations and commencement of a new stage in their lives. For others it is the time of Lent which also involves also an examination and a commencement in the spiritual area of life. Providentially, today's three readings are about tests and commencements, and have practical applications for both our temporal and spiritual lives. These two levels of human life are not completely separate and independent of each other, much less irreconcilably opposed to each other.

This is the one great error of our times. We tend to take the temporal affairs of life in isolation from spiritual principles and values, as if one has nothing to do with the other. Of course, body is not soul, and soul is not body, but if you separate the two you destroy the person. Complete separation of temporal affairs from spiritual values also brings death to civilization, to society, the family and the individual. But harmony, cooperation, symbiosis between the temporal and the spiritual bring about life, contentment, strength and success.

Now, what are the three bible readings telling us? What message are they sending us for the good of both our temporal and spiritual concerns? They are telling us of the value of tests and examinations. They warn us and equip us against the danger of deception. They exhort us to commence a really moral, spiritual

and religious life in order to transcend the incompleteness, futility and transitoriness of our existence on earth.

The third reading (Luke 6) points to a pervasive and an ever-present threat to every human being. Let us call it deception. It is found in all levels of human activity. Governments deceive their citizens; citizens deceive their governments. Parents deceive their children; children deceive their parents. Husbands deceive their wives; wives deceive their husbands. Boy deceives girl; girl deceives boy. Business people deceive their customers; customers deceive their creditors. Professionals deceive their clients; clients deceive the professionals. Superiors deceive their subordinates; subordinates deceive their superiors.

Name any sphere of human activity and you find deception like a snake lurking in the dark, looking for an opportunity to sink its poisonous fangs in your flesh. If deception does not come from outside you, it can come from inside you, for there is such a thing like self-deception, like the hypocrisy that Jesus condemns in today's gospel. He says, "How can you remove the splinter in your brother's eyes when there is a log in your own eye that prevents you from seeing clearly?"

The history of deception dates back to the origins of mankind. The snake, Satan, deceived the woman. Eve deceived her husband. Adam tried to deceive God. Cain deceived Abel and killed him. Rebecca deceived Isaac. Jacob deceived Esau. Laban deceived Jacob. The Pharaoh deceived Moses and the Israelites, and so on. Hence, the pervasiveness and recurrence of this evil.

How do you counteract and defend yourself from this evil? Sirach 27 and Luke 6 (first and third readings, respectively) show us how: test and examine the speech of your fellowmen, for speech shows the character of man. Just as a tree is known by its fruits, so is man known and evaluated by what he generally talks about. But even this testing has limited effectiveness. For many have

so mastered the art of deception that with difficulty you can distinguish the truth from falsehood. Save by using a lie detector for each case, you are never sure whether they are deceiving you or not. Satan is ever present personally or through his agents, to spread the deadly poison of deception.

Which then is the most effective defense and antidote? The second reading (1 Cor 15) gives the answer, "What is mortal should be changed to immortal." Paul is repeating what he said last Sunday in this same letter, "What is earthly must be changed to heavenly." It is Paul's doctrine of a new creation. We have to become new creatures again, possessing the innocence, simplicity, truthfulness and fidelity that characterized Adam and Eve fresh from the hands of God.

But recreation, i.e., remaking of creatures is the work of the Holy Spirit, just as the first creation was effected through the Word, i.e. the second divine Person. Hence, we need the Holy Spirit to protect ourselves from deception. The Holy Spirit will inspire us to speak words that bring life, joy and hope to others. With and through the Holy Spirit, we can shout along with Paul and Isaiah, whom he quotes the triumphant hymn of the recreated man, "Death, where is your victory; Death, where is your power to hurt?" In baptism and especially in the sacrament of confirmation, we all had received the Holy Spirit. Let us allow him to take hold of our whole being so that we can speak and act out words that communicate faith, hope and love in a world that is lacking so much of these.



**March 4, 2001**

**First Sunday of Lent      Cycle C**

**(Readings: Dt 26:4-10/Rom 10:8-13/Lk 4:1-13)**

The story about Jesus' temptation and victory, just like we heard from today's gospel reading, did not happen for its own sake, nor was it enshrined in the pages of the bible for its own sake. The story was written for us, for our own sake. Jesus' temptation is our temptation; Jesus' victory is the guide on how we should gain victory over our temptations.

Speaking of temptations, these should not be dismissed airily, throwing all cautions to the wind, on the ground that no one has yet seen the devil as he showed himself to Jesus. Therefore there is no need of great worry. But should the devil appear to us in person, shall we be able to recognize him and so to quickly put up our defenses for being forewarned of his presence? We know that he can disguise himself in many ways, like transforming himself into an angel of light, as Paul says (2 Cor 11:14), the better to deceive peoples.

But it need not come to that. Most often times, the devil does not need to lift a finger in order to tempt us. We are our own temptations, and we also tempt one another. Many things, besides, are sources of temptation: money, food, drinks, books, movies, motels, etc. The list is long and endless.

However, the omnipresence and pervasiveness of temptations need not make us neurotic and fearful to step out into the world and move around. Yes, of course, we find ourselves in a stage of continuous siege and bombardment, surrounded everywhere by dangerous hirelings and instrumentalities of the devil, who seek our spiritual downfall and reduce us to the status of mere animals, held captive and hostage to the blind instincts and prepossessions of the proud and arrogant.

Such was the status of the ancient Israelites in their enslavement to the Egyptians, under whose shadows lurked the ancient foe of humanity. To a similar status, although in this instance it is enslavement to sin, the devil wants to reduce modern Christians.

Be they ancient Israelites or modern Christians, to everyone the book of Deuteronomy (first reading) teaches how to surmount temptations and defeat the devil. We should cry for help to the Lord, and should trust in his great power and strength, it says. Then also, it assures that God will save us and rescue us. Actually, in this first reading, we have a liturgical, that is public prayer that the Israelites addressed to God annually. It recalls the promises the Lord made freely and unilaterally to them through their ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It recites before God the sufferings, hardship and misery that befell them, compromising the realization of the divine promises. Finally, it hails the wondrous intervention of God on their behalf, assuring the fulfillment of those promises. The Church and her children have appropriated, in a certain sense, this public prayer of the ancient Hebrews, along with the spirit and sentiments it embodies to enrich our annual exercise of Lenten devotion. The ground for this is our conviction that we Christians are the new people of God, the new Israel.

In the second reading (letter to the Romans), Paul shows how righteousness in God's eyes and its concomitant life in God, was won for us by Jesus. In other words, Paul, interpreting Moses, is telling us that actually it was not through our laborious effort, however necessary and required it may be, that we were able to gain righteousness and life in God. It was through faith in Jesus Christ; he was the one who laboriously gained them for us. As Paul says, continuing his interpretation of Moses, Christians did not have to go up to heaven and bring Christ down, nor to go down to the world below and bring Christ up from death. It was

Christ himself who became incarnated, who suffered, died and rose from the dead without our having anything to do strenuously to bring that about. And yet, if we confess that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, we are saved, we are put right with God, Paul assures us.

Finally, in the third reading, Jesus teaches us how to tame Satan and handle our temptations — by means of Scriptures. Jesus routed the devil thrice by quoting Scriptures each single time. Certainly, we shouldn't be too simplistic and thick-minded to think that by merely reciting some words from Scriptures, we can solve our problem. How will that differ from magic and incantation? No, it's a question of living according to Scripture, of acting it out. As Jesus says, "Not by bread alone does man live but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

**March 11, 2001**

**Second Sunday of Lent**

**Cycle C**

**(Readings: Gn 15:5-12, 17-18/Phil. 3:17-4:1/Lk 9:28b-36)**

Today's three bible readings remind me of the title of an old film, which although it sounds illogical yet it's eye-catching and thought provoking. The title was, "Back to the Future." Perhaps some of you have seen it yourselves. The movie was about a father and son team who with the help of a time machine can transfer themselves to any period in history. It's only a science-fiction movie. Why the title sounded illogical is because you can use the word "back" when referring to the past only, but you can't say, "back to the future/" You'd have to say, "advance to the future." That would be more logical.

But carried by this eye-catching and thought-provoking title, I proceed to ask, "Can one live and experience and see simultaneously past, present and future?" It looks impossible. We can

only have a memory of the past and a dream about the future. We live, and experience and see only the present. Such things experienced together are not stuff of the real world, but could be material for another science-fiction movie.

But it is possible for God, if not for man. For God, Scripture says, "a thousand years is one day and a day is one thousand years." In other words, God sees presentially both past and future, whether distant or near, occurring at the same time. Somehow, he shares with us his knowledge and vision of past, present and future through the three readings of today's Mass. They project to the eyes of our mind the image of simultaneous occurrences of past and future about Jesus (third reading), about Abraham (first reading), about spoiled Christians (second reading).

Starting then with the third reading, today's gospel narrates how the three apostles saw both the splendor of Jesus' glory as his body was transfigured, and the specter of his passion and death as he discussed this with Moses and Elijah. In other words, the three apostles saw at the same time, in nearest proximity, in smooth sequence of cause and effect, of principle and consequence, of seed and the first-fruits, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the humiliation and his glorification, his defeat and victory.

This striking vision left Peter and his two co-apostles brimming with joy that they forgot or did not mind to protect their bodies from the inclemencies of the weather and other discomforts that being on top of a high mountain can cause. Had Peter in that vision seen the death, humiliation and defeat of Jesus, he surely would have drowned in sorrow and despair. On the other hand, had Peter viewed only the resurrection, glorification and victory of Jesus, he could be tainted with complacency and over-confidence. Either way would be bad for him and his co-apostles. A panoramic view with all the interplay of the complete paschal mystery of Jesus is just the right thing for Peter and all Christians after him.

We have a similar case with Abraham (first reading), God announced to him, on one and the same occasion two contrasting events: the sufferings, hardships and oppressive captivity of his descendants; and their happiness, contentment, and peace that will result when God will fulfill his promises to him. This reading concludes by informing us that Abraham put his faith in the Lord, despite the conflicting announcements he heard and saw; he trusted in God's word and mercy (for that's the only religious and reasonable stance he could take), and because of this, God was pleased with him and accepted his faith as an act of righteousness.

Finally, we have in the second reading, Paul's own brand of simulcast, of panoramic vision. He views the cross of Christ in close relationship with his glorious Second Coming. (Standing in the present, Paul sees simultaneously past and future with the help of God's inspiration and comprehensive knowledge). He says it should always be that way in considering the person of Jesus Christ, integrating the cross with his glory, viewing them as inseparable, as one calling for the other.

Paul urges us to imitate his manner of viewing the mystery of Jesus, and not like those other Christians who, he says with tears in his eyes, reject the cross of Christ with its moral demands on our lives, but accept only what is pleasant and least demanding in Christianity. Paul says such minimalist or reductionist Christians, with the one-eyed or cock-eyed vision will end up in hell. Whereas, the integralist Christians, who imitate Paul in accepting both the cross and glory of Christ in their lives, are citizens of heaven even while on earth.

**March 18, 2001**

**Third Sunday of Lent**

**Cycle C**

**(Readings: Ex 3:1-8, 13-15/1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12/Lk 13:1-9)**

Why do we call the clock that wakes us up from our sleep an alarm clock? And why do people in the provinces call the bell that summons students and pupils to school a warning bell? Words like alarm and warning suggest an imminent danger, an approaching disaster. But did the clock at your bedside really apprise you of a coming disaster to merit the name "alarm clock"? If you were awoken by it, do you not just turn it off and continue enjoying your sleep? As for school bells, do they really announce an approaching danger to students and pupils to deserve the name "warning bells"? Do not some students and pupils just disregard the ringing of school bells to continue playing or day dreaming?

I hope our cavalier attitude to alarm clocks and school bells do not extend to the three readings of today since in 1 Corinthians 10 (our second reading) Paul affirms that Scriptures have been written down precisely as a warning for us. Hence, it would be truly dangerous and disastrous for us to turn off Scriptures as we do to alarm clocks or to disregard God's written word as if it were just a schoolbell.

Why and what was Paul warning us against? Against smugness and vain complacency for our having been chosen as God's new people, as the new Israel. Paul was telling us that God's covenant or compact with ancient Israel was not a guarantee he wouldn't punish his very people if they turned unfaithful to him. True, God heard their cry for deliverance from the oppression of Pharaoh and the Egyptians. True, God impressed them through his powerful acts in laying out an escape route for them through the Red Sea, in providing them with food and drink through their

40 years of stay in the desert. But his heavy hand could also strike them, as it did to the Egyptians because of their sins. We have to read more chapters of the book of Exodus, than the chapter 6 where we got today's first reading, so that we can find out where the chosen people of Israel failed their God.

Paul spared us this labor for he gives a list of their failures: they worshipped the golden calf in consequence of which they abandoned themselves to drunken orgies and immoralities. God punished that sin by destroying 23 thousand Israelites in just one day, a considerable number compared to their over-all population. Another sin was the people's rebellion against God and his lawful representatives, Moses and Aaron, in punishment for which another 14,700 perished in a plague. Paul concludes this section by stating that all these were written down as a warning for us. God could show himself a tender and thoughtful mother when he delivered his people from Egypt; but God could also show himself a strict judge and avenger when he punished his people for their infidelity.

Finally, in the third reading (Luke 13) Jesus is also warning us against smugness and vain complacency. All of us need to convert and return to God. Listen to what he says, "Unless you begin to reform, you will all come to the same end." He was referring to some Galilean Jews who were slain by order of Pilate, and to 18 people who were killed by a falling tower in Jerusalem. Was it because they were greater sinners than the rest that they met their untimely death? Many people thought so, but Jesus rejected the idea, and he seriously warned the living that they could come to the same end unless they all begin to reform.

Where does that leave us? Is there any excuse left to delay our conversion? Can we indulge ourselves in the false assurance that anyway we already have been planted in the Lord's vineyard, we have been baptized long ago in the Catholic Church? Listen to what the vineyard owner says to the vinedresser in today's

parable, "Look here! For three years now, I have been coming in search of fruit on this fig tree and found none. Cut it down. Why should it clutter up the ground?"

Among you are some Christians who have understood well the gospel message of today's Mass. They have seen clearly the need for spiritual conversion and reform. They have taken seriously Jesus' warning against smugness and vain complacency by joining a lay order that formerly was called the Third Order of Penance, but today is better known by the name of Dominican Laity. In fact, its members are celebrating today the 40th Foundation Anniversary of their Santo Domingo Chapter. Through their example and prayer, may the rest of us be convinced "to begin reforming" ourselves in accordance with the precept and message of Jesus in today's gospel.

**March 25, 2001**

**Annunciation**

(Readings: Is 7:10-14, **8:10/Heb** 10:4-10/Lk 1:26-38)

A week ago, we celebrated the feast of St. Joseph, patron of the universal Church. Today, we celebrate the feast of the Annunciation, where Mary, Mother of the Church, plays a prominent part. So, within this short period of time, we are privileged to consider the two grandest creatures of God, to whom we are indebted for so many favors and from whom we can still hope to receive more. Joseph and Mary come so easily together into our minds and hearts, not only because they are husband and wife of the first order meriting our endless admiration, but also because they are so similar, much of the same stuff when responding to the claims of God's will.

What God wants is their supreme law; for them God's will should be followed unquestioningly. So while they attract our



admiration because of their personal gifts, yet they direct our gaze to God, the source of all heavenly and natural gifts. In remembering and praying to Joseph and Mary, we are reminded to pray and address ourselves to the God-child they gave to us. In the book of Exodus (20:5), we read that God is a jealous God who does not tolerate that worship is given to others apart from him. His jealousy does not cover Joseph and Mary, for all the honor we give to them are referred back to God by them as to the final end. For this reason, God has honored Mary and Joseph as he never did nor ever will do to any other creature.

Let us now see how he honored Mary. The first instance was when she was conceived immaculate and free from original sin. God so filled her being with grace at that moment that she came out of the hand of Creator fresh, pure, beautiful and holy. From then on until the day the angel Gabriel was sent to Nazareth, hers was an existence like a tiny spring welling into a mighty river down the mountain, like a Morning Glory whose petals follow the course of the sun. But for all these wonders, nobody in the village noticed the singularity of this maiden. And I think, Mary herself was not aware (her humility would not have permitted it) that she was so different from the rest in the neighborhood.- What she must have been conscious of was the irrepressible love that kept on welling from her heart, leading her to exclaim like the beloved in the Song of Songs, "Kiss me with the kisses of your mouth — for your love is more delightful than mine. Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out" (1:2-3).

The time came when her desire for union with God would be fulfilled, but in the manner she least expected. The angel's greeting deeply disturbed her: that she was highly favored, that the Lord was with her, that she was the most blessed among all women. The second part was especially disquieting, "The Lord

is with you." Mary knew that nothing whatsoever in this world could separate her from God, and that the Lord was always with her. But acquainted as she was with Holy Scripture, she knew that such greeting portended a special office, a great mission, a unique honor that the Lord had planned to give to a favored one. Examples were Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samson, David, Deborah, Judith, Esther and others. And now what plan has God for Mary?

The angel told her reverently like it is in Fra Angelico's painting, "You shall conceive and bear a son and give him the name Jesus... The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most high will overshadow you; hence, the holy offspring to be born will be called Son of God..." Will Mary cooperate? Will she consent to be mother of God? The angel awaited her reply. "Fiat!" Mary said, "Let it be done to me, for I am the maidservant of the Lord." So the handmaid became the mother of God, but she never forgot that even as mother, her greatest honor was to do God's will and that she did throughout her life. Now in heaven, God takes pleasure doing his mother's will that's why Christians seek confidently her powerful intercession.

In the person, life and role of Mary, we see God's plan of saving mankind being fulfilled unerringly. Not even the reluctance or opposition of human agents could frustrate it. We see an instance of this in the so-called Emmanuel passage of Isaiah's book (our first reading today). The perpetuity of David's dynasty, a linchpin in God's plan of salvation, was being threatened by two conspiring kingdoms. Achaz, a descendant and successor at that time of King David, sought the help of the powerful emperor of Assyria against the objection of the prophet Isaiah. This had advised King Achaz to trust utterly on God's help and seek confirmation of it through any sign.

Achaz refused to obey on the pretext of not wanting to tempt the Lord. He could have been punished for this, but the merciful

God himself gave the sign, "The virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Emmanuel, that is, God-is-with-us." And come to think of it. When the child Emmanuel did appear finally, his first words according to Hebrews (our second reading) were, "A body you have prepared for me; I have come to do your will, O God."

Dear brethren, if there's another way by which men can be saved apart from doing God's will, let me know. Scripture has spoken, let men be silent.

**March 25, 2001**

**Annunciation**

**Alternative homily**

(Readings: **Is 7:10-14**, 8:10/Heb 10:4-10/Lk 1:26-38)

The theme of this feast throws light to the mystery of Easter, and is a prelude to it. The fact of the Incarnation or Conception of Jesus Christ in the womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary, whose consent the angel Gabriel sought, is the ground for the future events of the passion, death and resurrection of the Lord.

We have three beautiful readings on this feast of the Annunciation which hold a deep significance and current importance for us Christians of today. In reflecting on them, we shall follow the order in which the readings were proclaimed to us. The first reading is taken from the book of Isaiah 7, whose 14th verse is famous and is called the Good News about Emmanuel.

The backdrop against which this Good News was announced is supremely interesting. There were Rezin and Peka, two powerful kings in the north of Juda, who conspired to overthrow the young ruler Achaz, a descendant of David, and install in his place a foreigner. Achaz and the people of Juda were seriously worried over the integrity and preservation of David's dynasty and his

kingdom. Three centuries before, God had assured David an eternal throne and a perpetual kingdom. In those critical moments, the prophet Isaiah was sent by God to tell Achaz not to be afraid of his enemies but to put his complete trust in the Lord.

Isaiah even invited Achaz to ask any sign from God to prove that the Lord was at his side. Achaz, who was more political than religious excused himself by saying, "I do not want to tempt the Lord." For he had appealed to and negotiated with the distant Assyrian emperor to save him and his throne. Isaiah, therefore, rebuked Achaz and told him, "God himself will give you this sign: the Virgin shall be with child, and bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel." Furthermore, Isaiah revealed that even much before the child reaches the age of reason, the lands of the two kings who terrorized Achaz will be reduced to deserts.

The immediate reference of this prophetic sign is to Hezekiah, the pious son soon to be born and to succeed later his father Achaz. But this prophecy was perfectly fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, son of the Virgin Mary, who will rule forever and whose kingdom will have no end.

Isaiah said the child's name would be Immanuel, which means God-is-with-us. If God is with us, the first thing to disappear from us should be sin. Sin cannot be with us if God is with us. Hence, the child was also called Jesus because he would save us from our sins. The author of Hebrews 10 (second reading) agrees on this point when he says that Jesus replaced the old covenant of animal sacrifices supposed to remove sins but actually could not, with the new covenant of single sacrifice of his own body for the effective remission our sins.

Finally, we have the third reading (Luke, 1), which constitutes the rationale of the feast of Annunciation. Upon giving her consent at the angel's instance, Mary conceived Jesus in her womb. St. Augustine noted in a sermon explaining this mystery, that Mary

conceived Jesus first in her heart through her faith and her consent before conceiving him in her womb.

For me, this insight of St. Augustine is masterful and very pastoral. Since it leaves to us the possibility of also conceiving Jesus in our hearts because no other way is open for us to conceive him. Did not Jesus himself say, "whoever does the will of my Father, he/she is my mother, my sister, my brother?" Through faith and obedience to the will of God, we conceive Jesus in our hearts, and we become his mother, his sisters, his brothers and cousins. We become partakers, rightful sharers in his eternal kingdom.

**March 25, 2001**

**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

**Cycle C**

**(Readings: Josh 5:9, 10-12/2 Cor 5:17-21/Lk 15:1-3, 11-32)**

There is here, in the three bible readings of today's Mass, a message of hope for all the land, just the thing we all need at the moment. It takes a Pharisee and an arrogant lawyer, like the ones described in today's gospel, to deny the universality of this message and consider themselves (the elite of mankind) as sole recipients of the bounties of the creator. To this day, though, we still have pharisaic characters and arrogant people on this planet.

One great bounty that God favors his creatures with, today as much as in the past, is the gift of pardon and the opportunity to change. And he pardons his children and enables them to change, in a way that involves him closely and costs him dearly. Not, obviously, in the manner of a judge of the court who acquits a defendant without a show of emotion, as protocol requires.

Somehow, all of us can identify with the prodigal son of today's gospel for having been ungrateful to our Father and squandering his gifts to us. At one time or another we did have

the brazenness of demanding our so-called rights and inheritance from God, then packing up our baggage we exhibited an arrogance of some sort by living wantonly and recklessly away from all remembrance of our Father.

If we can identify with the prodigal son in his foolishness, we can also imitate him in his repentance and wisdom to change. The assurance exists that our heavenly Father will be there to receive us and to restore us to his former favors. If and when this change occurs, it will be good to remember, as Paul stated (second reading), that all this is done by God through Jesus Christ. Joined to Christ, we become new beings. The old is gone and forgotten, the new has come and forever remembered. From enemies God has changes us into his friends — a change he continues doing worldwide and at every time.

In the past, God took away the reproach of Egypt, that is, the shame of slavery that covered the faces of his people Israel for centuries (first reading). He keeps doing it even at present, sometimes spectacular way in areas of human life we least expect. While changes in moral and spiritual life are to be considered fundamental and of first priority, they are also needed in other areas of human life, like the political, the economic, the social.

It is to the glory of God and a proof of his genuine fatherly love that changes can still occur for human beings and opportunities are open for their improvement. Only those in hell or in heaven do not change their status of loss or of happiness.

Coming nearer home, and drawing a practical lesson from the readings of today's Mass, we can correctly say that the reproach of Egypt, that is, the veil of shame has hung too long on the Filipino. Whether he once lived under foreign domination or later regained his independence, many shameful acts had been committed against him or by himself. The veil of shame need not hide his face forever. An opportunity for change is being opened to

him in many providential forms, like this season of Lent, this Jubilee year, and not the least the regular election processes if and when done properly.

**April 1, 2001**

**Fifth Sunday of Lent      Cycle C**

**(Readings: Is 43; 16-21/Phil 3:8-14/Jn 8:1-11)**

Those of us who have gone to school and studied grammar surely know what is past tense or future tense, that is, time in the past and time in the future. Well, practically that is what the three bible readings of today's Mass are talking about, surely not in the interest of grammar but of life, our human life and existence. Briefly, this is the message of the three readings, "Forget the past and look to the future."

There are people who do not have to be told twice to forget the past because age, catabolism, and failing health unfortunately make them forgetful anyway. They forget names, faces, dates, and events. There are people, however, who appear unable to separate from the past: the good old days, the good old songs, the good old habits and pastimes are their heirlooms, not to be traded for anything in the world. These are the people who are still alive today but living in ancient history.

Conversely, there are people who do not have to be told twice to look to the future. These are the children, the teen-agers, the young who dream about what they are going to be and where they will find their luck. There is little in their tender years and experience that will make them look back with longing to their past which is just as little anyway. But there are also people who are afraid to look into the future. For them, it is a big question mark. Will the future be good? Will they cope and survive? Will it be cruel?

Where do we fit in these various classifications of people? Of course, one could answer this way somewhat like a *filosofo*, "I don't fit in any. One doesn't live in the past; one doesn't live in the future. One lives in the present." True. But when the three bible readings bid us to forget the past and look to the future, they are setting the tone for living in the present. In other words, if you do not forget the past and if you do not look to the future, you cannot have a happy present.

The above statement is given in broad lines. We should find out in detail what kind of a past the three bible readings are telling us to forget, and what kind of a future to look forward to. According to the third reading, Jesus, who pardoned the woman caught in the act of committing adultery, is telling her to give up her sinful ways and relationships and build herself a future through honorable ties and commitments. What he told to the woman, he tells to us all, considering things to be considered and applying matters to be applied.

A life of sin, begun in the past, has to be given up and forgotten. This is an absolute condition for deserving divine favors. But sometimes even a good and legitimate past is given up for the sake of a better and brighter future. This is a step that only the brave and strong of heart can take, not the timid and over-cautious. In the second reading, Paul who bids us to imitate him, makes this grand statement, "One thing I do is to forget what is behind me and to push on what is ahead." And he says also, "All those things which before I counted or profit, now I consider them as garbage for the sake of what is so much more valuable — the knowledge of Christ Jesus, my Lord."

In the first reading, it is not Paul or any other saint but God himself, who says to his people, "Do not cling to events of the past (no matter how amazing) or dwell on what happened long ago (no matter how glorious). Watch for the new thing I am going



to do. It is happening already — can you not see it now?" We must be so blind that we cannot see anything happening despite the Lord's affirmation. Nor do we understand what God is talking about. But the fact remains that God's words are being addressed to us today as he addressed them to the Israelites in olden times. So they must have a meaning for us today, and it is: God's love did amazing and glorious things for his chosen people in the distant past. It does not mean he will not do the same thing for his new people today, because God's love is not bounded by time or space. What is important is that we keep eternally alive our hope and our trust in God's love.

For our take-home lessons from today's readings, we can ask ourselves these questions: As individuals shall we take up their advice to forget the past and look ahead to the future?

**Passion Sunday      Cycle C**  
**(Readings: Is 50:4-7/Phil 2:6-11/Lk 22:14-23-56)**

On this day we commemorate and re-enact the entrance of Jesus Christ into the city of Jerusalem, which as you know was marked with a joyous welcome, enthusiastic reception, outpouring of deep emotions by the people. Why, even the stones were ready, if necessary, to cry out and join in the public jubilation, as Jesus pointed out in Luke's gospel.

The road which Jesus took to make his entrance into the city was forthwith strewn with branches cut from the trees, was carpeted with cloaks people removed from their backs to lay on the ground, was heaving with the sounds of thunderous hossanahs that the crowds let loose from their lungs and hearts.

Modern-day political rallies, with their carefully manipulated and well-financed recruitments, cavalcades and assemblies, pale

into insignificance when compared to the spontaneity, simplicity and depth of feeling the motley crowd in Jerusalem demonstrated for their "idol", their "candidate", their Messiah.

In their thinking, their Messiah (riding on a donkey as Zechariah foretold) was going to take possession of his kingdom, was going to be installed on his throne, proclaimed as victor and ruler, distribute the bounty of his riches and spoils among his subjects.

Indeed! And Jesus was going to fulfill all their expectations but in a manner and to the extent that exceeded theirs and our wildest dreams. Jesus was entering Jerusalem to freely accept the verdict, the sentence and execution of death by crucifixion! This was his Father's will.

We would like to identify with that jubilant crowd accompanying Jesus on the road to Jerusalem. At the same time, however, we would feel guilty over the fact that we are leading him in effect to his death on the cross, not unless we renounce also ourselves and die to our sins. That is the long and short about all this Passion Sunday. Christ came to destroy death and sin, and to restore us to the Father and his kingdom.

### **Passion Sunday**

### **Cycle C**

#### **Alternative homily**

**(Readings: Is 50:4-7/Phil 2:6-11/Lk 22:14-23-56)**

Today, Holy Mother Church presents us with three bible readings that we can rightly consider the jewels of Holy Scripture. She has carefully chosen from her treasure-chest three stones of immense beauty, beholding which we are led to exclaim like the Roman officer in today's gospel, "Truly Jesus is the innocent, sinless one, the Son of God." This was his conclusion after seeing the manner how Jesus died.

How come not all who saw and heard about the crucifixion arrived at the same conclusion? By people who should have known better because they have Scriptures, they heard his preaching and saw his miracles? While here, it is a pagan officer of the Roman Army who saw the crucifixion and acknowledged the crucified One for what he really is — the innocent one, the Son of God.

The reason why some people cannot believe in Jesus is because they themselves have set the conditions for believing. They do not leave that to God. They want to act like gods and bend the true God to their wishes and fancies. Hence, they put themselves outside the pale of salvation.

God has pre-set, pre-determined from eternity the conditions for mankind's salvation. Not only men/women are to accept these conditions, but even the man Jesus, the Messiah himself who will implement God's plan of salvation. Thus, Isaiah 50 (first reading) predicted that God's Servant or implementor would obey to the fullest and not deviate in the slightest what God has determined for him to do, even when insults would heap upon him, or people spit in his face, or enemies pluck hairs from his beard.

Another jewel from Scripture is the incomparable ancient Christian hymn that Paul integrated into his letter to the Philippians (second reading). It recalls in song how the man Jesus utterly submitted himself *to* God's plan of salvation. This plan calls for two stages of action involving the person of Jesus: first, that of complete divestment of his rights and privileges leading to total humiliation and death. Second, that of complete exaltation in power and honor starting with his resurrection.

This ancient hymn, forever preserved in Paul's letter, is a constant reminder for us to have the same attitude and mind as Jesus, and to accept the same destiny of equal share of pain and glory.

On this feast of Palm Sunday, also called Passion Sunday, recalling the triumphant and joyous entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem, we have listened to the sober message of today's most beautiful bible readings, viz. acceptance of the cross is the only road to ultimate victory and happiness.

**Easter Sunday (Morning Mass)**

**(Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43/Col 3:1-4/Jn 20:1-9)**

A Happy Easter to all of you. Surely, there are many good reasons why Easter or Resurrection Sunday can bring happiness to us to be able to wish one another a Happy Easter. Let us not forget, however, that Easter Sunday and all the happiness associated with it, has been preceded by a Good Friday as necessarily as any Sunday is always preceded by a Friday.

This reminds us of the truth, otherwise very frequently relegated to oblivion, that the glory of the Resurrection is the fruit and reward of the pains of the Passion and Death. The relationship between the two is that of cause and effect. Just as any effect calls for its cause, so Resurrection calls for Passion and Death. Besides, we cannot truly speak of a resurrection if there was no prior agony and death.

We can also look at it this other way: Good Friday leads to Easter Sunday as necessarily as any Friday leads to a Sunday. This again reminds us of the truth that all sacrifices accepted or done for God's sake merit their rewards. What went by for Jesus, that is, his sacrifices being rewarded by the Father, will also go by for each of us. Our sacrifices will never be in vain.

Briefly, the glory of Easter Sunday can never be separated, in practice or in theory, from the agony of Good Friday, either in regards to Jesus or to us his followers. For in the present condition of humanity, of createdness, pain and happiness are

related to one another as cause and effect, as principle and consequence. In his glorious risen body, Jesus Christ retained the marks caused by the nails and the spear in obvious reference to the fact that he gained the glory of his resurrection and exaltation through the painful process of suffering and death.

This takes us to the next question, quite sensitive as it is inescapable, given our human bias. Was not all this suffering, especially the crucifixion which is the most cruel, humiliating, violent, death-inducing punishment ever invented by man, avoidable in the case of Jesus? Was he not the Son of God, the only begotten of the Father? Could not the Father have chosen other ways more humane, more civilized and just as effective for redeeming and saving mankind?

To all those questions the answer is yes and yes. Yet, what actually happened was contrary to all that our human inclinations and sensibilities would have approvingly expected. Jesus died a violent death because it was his Father's will.

Did that mean that God enjoys the carnage and gory that crucifixion in truth is? Was sin more powerful that it could strike mortally the sinless One? Did death have a greater say than God's mercy? Were the enemies of Jesus guiltless because he had to die anyway? To all those questions the answer is no and no. Then why did God allow his Son Jesus to be crucified?

John, who at first could not understand that Jesus had to die at the hands of men before he could enter into his glory (see third reading), wrote later on in his letter, "In this way the love of God was revealed to us: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might have life through him" (1 Jn 4:9). And Paul, exhorting us in today's second reading to start a heavenly life because we have resurrected in principle along with Jesus Christ, also wrote elsewhere, "God did not spare his own Son but handed him over for love of us all" (Rom 8:32).

**Sin** and death, its **natural** consequence, had overstepped their bounds by daring to harm the sinless One, the spotless Lamb of God. To punish their defiance and criminal assault against his Son, the Father raised up and glorified Jesus, making him the source of resurrection and salvation for all those who would believe in him.

Hence, the Good News that Paul brought to the household of the pagan Cornelius (first reading) is also meant for us. Peter assures us that he was eyewitness to the risen Christ, having eaten and drank with him three days after his death, and that he was commanded by the Lord to preach the gospel to everyone so that those who would believe will find salvation in Jesus' name. That gospel was preached to Cornelius and his family; they all believed and found salvation in Jesus. The same gospel has been preached to us and we all believe; we also have found salvation in Jesus. This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad.

### **Easter Sunday (Morning Mass)**

#### **Alternative homily**

**(Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43/Col 3:1-4/Jn 20: 1-9)**

A Happy Easter to all of you. I begin this homily by greeting all of you a Happy Easter. Surely, there must exist very good reasons why Easter or Resurrection Sunday brings happiness to us to be able to wish each other a Happy Easter. Let us, however, not forget that Easter Sunday, and all the happiness that is associated to it, has been preceded by a Good Friday, as necessarily as any Sunday is always preceded by a Friday.

This reminds us of the truth, otherwise susceptible of being forgotten, that the glory of the Resurrection is the fruit of the pains of the Passion and Death. The relationship between the two is that of effect and cause. Just as any effect calls for its cause,

so Resurrection calls for Passion and Death. Besides, we cannot truly speak of a resurrection if there was no previous passion and death.

We can also look at it this other way: Good Friday leads to Easter Sunday, as necessarily as any Friday always leads to a Sunday. This reminds us, once more, of the truth that all sacrifices accepted/done in God's name and for God's sake lead necessarily to their due rewards. What went by with Jesus, that is, his sacrifices being rewarded by the Father with glorification, will also go by with each of us. Our sacrifices will never be in vain.

Thus pain and happiness, in the present condition of createdness, are related to one another according to the necessary relation of cause and effect, of principle and consequence. In his glorious risen body, Jesus Christ retained the marks caused by the nails and the spear in an obvious reference to the truth that he gained the glory of his resurrection and exaltation through the painful process of suffering and dying.

This takes us to the next question, quite sensitive as it is inescapable, given our human bias. Crucifixion is the most cruel, humiliating, violent death-producing punishment ever invented by the human mind. Could not all this suffering avoidable and preventable for Jesus? Was he not the Son of God, the only begotten, beloved Son of the Father? Could not the Father have thought of other ways, more human, more civilized and just as effective, of redeeming and saving mankind?

To all these questions, and similar others you may raise, the answer is yes and yes. Yet, the actual fact is that, contrary to human expectations and sensibilities, Jesus died a violent death by crucifixion because it was his Father's will. Did that mean that God takes pleasure in carnage and gory processes which crucifixion is in reality? Was sin more powerful that it could strike death even to the sinless One, the Son of God? Has death a greater

say than God's mercy? Were the enemies of Jesus guiltless because he had to die anyway? To all these questions, the answer is no and no. Then why did God allow Jesus to be crucified?

John, who before could not understand that Jesus needed to die first before entering into his glory, would write later on, "God showed his love for us by sending his only Son into the world to be the means by which our sins are forgiven."

Paul who exhorts us to start living a heavenly life because in principle, we have resurrected along with Jesus, also writes, "God did not even keep back his own Son but offered him for us all."

As for sin and death (its natural consequence) they have overstepped their bounds by daring to harm the sinless One, the spotless Lamb of God.

In punishment for their audacity and arrogance, God the Father destroyed the power of sin and death by resurrecting and exalting his beloved Son Jesus Christ. He also made him the source of resurrection and salvation for all who would believe in him. Hence, the Good News that Peter brought to the household of Cornelius is also meant for us. Peter assures us that he was eyewitness to the risen Christ, having eaten and drunk with him three days after his death, that he was commanded to preach the gospel to everyone so that those who would believe will find salvation in Jesus' name.

**Easter Sunday (Afternoon Mass)**  
**(Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43/Col 3:1-4/Lk 24: 13-35)**

Our three bible readings today affirm repeatedly and emphatically the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ after his crucifixion, death and burial. We welcome this repetitiousness and emphasis because by it, Mother Church wants to drive home into



our consciousness that belief in the Risen Christ should become the environment in which we live, the air we breathe, the light we move around with, the food we draw life and strength from.

This reminder is particularly good for Filipino Christians who by idiosyncrasy or by circumstance of life are more drawn to the sorrow of Good Friday than to the felicity of Easter Sunday. We Filipinos feel sympathy for the underdog of society, for the oppressed, the innocent victims because we think, we too, are the underdogs, the oppressed, the whipping boys of nations.

Hence, the figure of a Jesus betrayed, falsely accused, unjustly sentenced, tortured and vilified, nailed to a tree, pierced with a lance, forgotten by men and seemingly by God also — strikes a more responsive cord in the heart of a Filipino Christian than does the portrait of a resurrected Christ. In our popular religiosity, we have created a pious culture complete with crucifixions around the theme of Good Friday which has become an object of curiosity and admiration for tourists and foreign visitors.

Why is it that while we carry in our person no symbol of the resurrection, the cross is an ubiquitous pendant adorning the neck or earlobes of saints and sinners, even of criminals and villains as you oftentimes see in movies or TV. Is it because the Resurrection is too abstract a truth for representing it graphically and turning it into a handy little ornament that we can carry about in our body? Is it because the Filipino Christian has a bias towards the gloomier side of life, of guilt-feelings and remorse so that not only the Abels but also the Cains among us wear a cross as a talisman against dangers and catastrophes?

**Good Friday is not the end-all of the Holy Week.** Good Friday should lead to Easter Sunday. You certainly know of many Christians who seldom or never go to Mass on Sundays, including Easter Sunday. But they do not fail to go to Church on Good Friday, even if, as you well know, there is no Mass on that day.

There is a need of correcting such attitudes and biases. There is a need for a balanced appreciation of the mysteries of the passion, death and resurrection.

For all the attraction that Good Friday has on the Filipino people, he should not fill the calendar of his life with many Good Fridays that he practically leaves no space for Easter Sundays. Death is not the end of everything. It should not paralyze us with fear and bind us with inertia. Christ has conquered death, and in his power, we shall also conquer death. Death is a transition to life, to a transformed life. Good Friday is a transition to Easter Sunday.

Mother Church repetitiously and emphatically sounds a call to us today to awake to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus. It is the culmination, the crowning point of all that preceded it, the fulfillment of the divine promises in the Old and New Testaments, the scriptures and predictions about Jesus. His resurrection proves that Jesus Christ is God, is Savior of mankind, is Source of our own resurrection and life, even as he declared, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

The inevitability of death should not cause us to raise our hands in surrender. Death for us is the gate opening to a new and perduring life. Even before death closes the lids of our eyes, we should struggle to transform our world according to the spirit of the Gospel. But the transformation should start from us, so that its rippling effects become wider and continuously touching the shores of other souls. Let us not allow our potentials for becoming good and doing good to others remain in the tomb of fear and inaction. In the power of Christ, who broke the fetters of death and emerged victorious from his tomb, let us also arise from our prison of sin and vices and together walk in freedom and joy towards the kingdom of God that Jesus has won for us.

## **Easter Sunday (Afternoon Mass)**

### **Alternative homily**

**(Readings: Acts 10:34, 37-43/Col 3:1-4/Lk 24:13-35)**

A Happy Easter to all. The word Easter or East has lots of things to teach us. We point to the east as the place of sunrise. One can tell who and what kind of person you are by finding out whether you prefer watching the sunrise or the sunset. Sunrise, it seems, is for active people, while sunset is for the romantics. Sunrise is for the young, the restless, the idealist, the dreamer just as sunset is for the old, the tired, those who seek rest after a hard day.

One can also tell what kind of a Christian you are by asking whether the passion of Christ appeals more to you than his resurrection, not that there is a contradiction between the two, but that a preference for one or the other somehow reflects on your behavior.

Consider, for example, the attitude of the two Emmaus disciples heading for home at sunset. It had been a hard day for both of them; what disappointments, what failed expectations, what shattered dreams they were carrying in their heavy hearts! They had witnessed the crucifixion of Jesus. They saw him die. For them, the end has come, the curtain has fallen, the sunset has taken hold.

Jesus himself, in today's gospel reading, had to rebuke his Emmaus disciples for their pessimism, for harboring thoughts that his death marked the end of everything that Jesus stood for, and for being slow to believe in his resurrection despite the assurances of the women of their group and the investigation made by some of those from them at the tomb.

All three bible readings, in fact, bid us to look to the east, to the sunrise, to the beginning of a new day, to the start of an era in our lives, to the first spring of energy, to the first ray of hope, to the first sound of music, to the first song of joy — Happy Easter to all of you.

**April 22, 2001**

**Second Sunday of Easter**

**Cycle C**

**(Readings: Acts 5:12-16/Apoc 1:9-11, 12-13, 17-19/Jn 20:19-31)**

The third reading of today's Mass (John 20) concludes with this remark from its author, "Jesus performed many other miracles which are not written down in this book. But these have been written in order that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, that is, the Christ the Son of God, and that through your faith in him you may have life." In other words, St. John recorded in his gospel not all but, selectively, some miracles done by Jesus for the purpose of inducing belief in those who care to read or listen to his gospel.

And why must one believe that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God? So that through faith in him, one can have life. The words of John are clear and simple. The way he builds up his thesis is also simple. Miracles are proper for inducing belief. The object of this belief is Jesus. Through this belief one gains eternal life. The forward thrust of John's argument is clear and simple: miracles lead to faith; faith, in turn, leads to life.

But there is more to John's simple argument than is handily apparent. Obviously, he is writing not for dead readers but for the living, yet he says the living can gain life if they believe in Jesus. Now, isn't that strange? If one is already alive, why bother to gain life? There are many life-styles just as there are many ways of earning a living. But all that cannot compare with the

"life" one gains by believing in Jesus. You can boast of having this or that life-style, this or that kind of livelihood, but if you don't believe in Jesus you don't have life, according to St. John. At most you only have a shadow of life.

Once again, miracles are steps toward faith in Jesus. That's why St. John took care of recording in his gospel the salient miracles of Jesus. There are people who don't believe in miracles even if these happened before their noses. On the other hand, there are people who see miracles in most everything they come into contact with. Both attitudes are exaggerated: the former prevents the birth of faith; the latter trivializes faith.

For every miracle of Jesus that John recorded in his gospel, we see two opposite effects on the eyewitnesses. Some are led to believe in Him as the Messiah and Son of God; the others become obstinate in opposing and detracting Jesus. Take, for example, the miracle of the resurrection whereby Jesus raised himself from the dead. This is the greatest of his miracles. The Pharisees, chief priests and scribes stooped ever so low as to resort to bribing the guards to spread the lie that Jesus' disciples stole his body. How the enemies of Jesus persisted in their opposition to the very end!

But for Peter, John, the other apostles, and the rest of the faithful followers of Jesus, the resurrection was a turning point in their lives. As we can notice from the first reading of today's Mass (Acts 5), from timid, frightened, confused persons that they had been during Christ's passion, crucifixion and death, they became outgoing, confident and forceful communicators of the Good News and performers of charitable works after his resurrection.

Written vividly in their minds are the words Jesus spoke and John preserved in his book of Revelation chapter 1 (our second reading), "Don't be afraid. I am the First and the Last, the Alpha

and the Omega. I am the living One! I was dead, but now I am alive for ever and ever."

This affirmation of Jesus that he is alive forever and ever was their source of strength, the ground of their self-confidence, the engine of their multifarious apostolate. To our own timidity, fright and confusion, which constitute, so to speak, our daily passion, suffering and cross, can there be other solution than the one the first apostles and early Christians discovered for their problems? There can not be. As Paul would say for us, "Christ, yesterday, today and forever." He is our solution.

**April 29, 2001**

**Third Sunday of Easter Cycle C**

**(Readings: Ads 5:27-32, 40-41/Apoc 5:1M4/Jn 21:1-19 or 21:1-14)**

One lesson we can derive from today's three bible readings is that men have the duty to praise God. That seems a commonplace statement. But the fact is that God is not being praised as he deserves. Praising God is not only the duty and the proper thing to do for a man, but it is the essence of his being, of his nature of being a creature. Christian philosophers and theologians following the teachings of St. Thomas say that man cannot exist, that is, come into existence unless he accepts being a contingent being, that is, he could have not existed even if he does exist now. The same philosophers and theologians say that God could not be God unless he be a necessary being, that is, he now exists as necessarily as he existed before and will exist necessarily forever.

Scripture renders these seemingly complicated affirmations into simple statements like "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever" (Heb 13:8) or that other one, "I am who I am" (Exodus 3). So, God exists for it is necessary for him to be; man exists but he could have not existed for he is contingent. There

was no time when God was not. There was a time when you and I were not. This is because God is a necessary being and we are contingent beings. The consequence of this is that men should praise God since it was he who gave existence to us.

How should men carry out their duty of praising God? Today's readings offer three examples: one, by associating our sufferings to the praises we give to God. When accepted and endured in freedom, our sufferings become so many praises and songs to God. Since our life is filled with and accompanied by sufferings, we have abundant opportunities to praise God in this manner. Thus, in the first reading, the apostles are said to have praised God for the privilege of suffering for his sake and for Jesus Christ his Son.

Two, by declaring undying love for Christ and by concerning oneself about the welfare of others. Thus, we read in today's gospel its long form that Peter declared again and again his love for Christ to the point of concerning himself with the lambs and sheep of Jesus. Three, by joining others in a common act of praise and worship to God, just like we do when we come to church for Mass. Revelation 5 gives us a stupendous vista of the entire creation praising God. All join in singing the praises of God, not only the rational creatures like angels and men but also the mountains, the hills, the forests, the meadows, the flowers, the rivers and seas, and all that they contain. All join in the singing. With what language, only God knows.

As contingent beings, that is, creatures that could have not existed although we do exist now, we have the duty not only to praise God out of gratitude but also to pray to God out of necessity. In less than three weeks from now, we as a nation will find ourselves at a crossroad. For one who is unfamiliar with a city, a crossroad is not only confusing but a real cross. In the synchronized local and national elections of 1998, many of us are

still unfamiliar, unsure, unsettled about a number of things. Will the elections unite our nation or exacerbate its deepening divisions? Will the candidates attempt to influence the voters more through money, threat or empty promises than through rational discussions of issues? Will the voters allow themselves to be influenced by the former means?

While election-related violence reported in some places of the country causes worry, the real danger to a clean, honest and orderly election is whether the candidates reach the conviction that the only way for winning is through money or its equivalent, especially when the voters themselves give the signal that their vote is up for sale to the highest bidder.

Power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory and praise are mentioned in the second reading. Who does not love and desire these things? Ask the candidates. But the book of Revelation which makes mention of them says for whom they are. For the Lamb of God, the Messiah who was killed, and participatingly for those who imitate his death in spirit or in fact. Let us pray to the Lord, who accepts although does not need our praises, to be with us as we reach the crossroad of the May 11 synchronized elections. It is us who need his guidance, his favor and his company.