

# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

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SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE  
APOSTOLIC LETTER NOVO MILLENNIO INEUNTE  
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CATHOLIC TEACHERS  
*Tamerlane Lana, OP*

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THROUGH SOCIAL ADVOCACY  
*FABC-OHD*

AN ATTEMPT TO BRING THE CONCERN  
ON INTERFAITH DIALOGUE TO ACUP  
*Vicente Cajilig, OP*

# **BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS**

## **The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin**

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## **Prayer: Our Cry to God** **(Post-election Reflection)**

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

When the baby cries the mother knows there is something wrong with her baby. Maybe it is because it needs to be washed and powdered; maybe it is in pain; maybe it is sick; maybe it just needs to be embraced by the mother. Whatever is the case, the baby is successful in calling the attention of the mother who just cannot bear hearing the cry of her little dear one.

Where is the baby crying? Is it in the playroom? Is it in the sala? Or just down the stairs because the baby has just fallen from on high. The cry enables the mother to identify the place where she should go, and behold, picks up the kid to her embrace.

The cry of the community is always louder than the cry of the baby. Much more the lamentation of a nation is always louder than that of a provincial community. That is why in our country, there was the 1898 revolution; there was the struggle of the guerillas in 1940's; there was Edsa I in 1986; there was Edsa II and III in 2001. Our country has been crying for peace, for justice, for liberty, for development, etc...

Who listen to the cry of the country? Did the Marcos regime listen to the cry at the streets of Manila and elsewhere? Has the church listened to the outcry of the masses who long for the basic needs of life, have education, job opportunities and so forth.

The people cry again and again. Yet the Church could not handle all the basic needs. For most of the basic needs are the responsibilities of government. PCP II intended to listen to the need of the poor. In fact the poor has been the object of the Church's fundamental option. Yet, even as the year 2001 began the outcry continues.

The feeling after crying is a liberating one. Even if the crier has not achieved what he/she has cried for. This is what happened actually after election. A feeling of general satisfaction because there are new hopes. The renewed hopes brought by desire that the newly elected officers would attend to the needs, especially of the young, to whom the future of our country belongs. The answer to prayers made months prior to the election has been somehow made visible. Yes, there were complaints about vote buying, cheating, and mal-counting in canvassing. But the new leadership, we believe, will think twice or thrice or more before frustrating again the aspiration of the electors to have Easter day in politics. We hope and trust that somehow all winners get the message: enough is enough.

Fidelity to promise would be what is expected from our re-elected or newly elected leaders. Who among them has not heard the prayer in basic christian communities, parishes and dioceses for the welfare of our country. Prayers have been the avenues where the people made their cries heard: Lord of all, hear the prayers of your people.

## **Message for the 87th World Day of Migration 2001**

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JOHN PAUL II

The Pastoral Care of Migrants,  
a Way of Accomplishing the Mission of the Church Today

1. *"Jesus Christ is the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be forever"* (Heb 13:8). These words of the apostle Paul, chosen as the motto of the Great Jubilee that has just ended, recall the mission of Jesus, Word incarnate for the salvation of the world. Faithful to his task in the service of the Gospel, the Church continues to approach people of all nationalities to bring them the good news of salvation.

With this present Message, on the occasion of the World Day of Migration, I wish to reflect on the evangelizing mission of the Church with respect to the vast and complex phenomenon of emigration and mobility. This year, the following theme was chosen for the commemoration: *The pastoral care of migrants, a way to accomplish the mission of the Church today*. This is an area that many pastoral agents have at heart for they know quite well the numerous problems that are found there. They also know the

various situations that make men and women leave their own country. In fact, mobility that is chosen freely is one thing; mobility caused by ideological, political or economic constraint is an entirely different thing. It is not possible to ignore this in planning and carrying out a suitable pastoral care for the various categories of migrants and itinerant people.

The Dicastery, which has the institutional task of expressing the solicitude of the Church for people involved in the phenomenon, summarizes all of human mobility with the aforementioned terminology. The term "migrant" is intended first of all to refer to refugees and exiles in search of freedom and security outside the confines of their own country. However, it also refers to young people who study abroad and all those who leave their own country to look for better conditions of life elsewhere. The migration phenomenon is in continuous expansion, and this poses questions and challenges to the pastoral action of the Church community. The II Vatican Ecumenical Council, in the Decree *Christus Dominus*, called for a "special concern ... for those among the faithful who, on account of their way or condition of life, cannot sufficiently make use of the common and ordinary pastoral service of parish priests or are totally deprived of it. Among them are very many migrants, exiles and refugees" (no. 18).

In this complex phenomenon, numerous elements come in: the tendency to foster the political and juridical unity of the human family, the noteworthy increase in cultural exchanges, interdependence among States, particularly in the economic sphere, the liberalization of trade and, above all, of capital, the multiplication of multinational enterprises, the imbalance between rich and poor countries, the development of the means of communication and transportation.

2. The interplay of such factors produces the movement of masses from one area of the globe to another. Although in varying

forms and degrees, mobility has thus become a general characteristic of mankind. It directly involves many persons and reaches others indirectly. The vastness and complexity of the phenomenon calls for a profound analysis of the structural changes that have taken place, namely the globalization of economics and of social life. The convergence of races, civilizations and cultures within one and the same juridical and social order, poses an urgent problem of cohabitation. Frontiers tend to disappear, distances are shortened, the repercussion of events is felt up to the farthest areas.

We are witnessing a profound change in the way of thinking and living, which cannot but present ambiguous aspects together with the positive elements. The sense of temporariness, for instance, induces one to prefer what is new to the detriment of stability and a clear hierarchy of values. At the same time, the spirit becomes more curious and open, more sensitive and ready for dialogue. In this climate, people may be induced to deepen their own convictions, but also to indulge in superficial relativism. Mobility always implies an uprooting from the original environment, often translated into an experience of marked solitude accompanied by the risk of fading into anonymity. This situation may lead to a rejection of the new environment, but also to accepting it acritically, in contrast to the preceding experience. At times, there could even be a willingness to undergo a passive modernization, which could easily be the source of cultural and social alienation. Human mobility means numerous possibilities to be open, to meet, to assemble; however it is not possible to ignore the fact that it also brings about manifestations of individual and collective rejection, a fruit of closed mentalities that are encountered in societies beset by imbalance and fear.

3. In her pastoral activity, the Church tries to take these serious problems constantly into consideration. The proclamation of the Gospel is directed towards the integral salvation of the human



person, his authentic and effective liberation, through the achievement of conditions of life suitable to his dignity. The comprehension of the human being, that the Church acquired in Christ, urges her to proclaim the fundamental human rights and to speak out when they are trampled upon. Thus, she does not grow tired of affirming and defending the dignity of the human person, highlighting the inalienable rights that originate from it. Specifically, these are the right to have one's own country, to live freely in one's own country, to live together with one's family, to have access to the goods necessary for a dignified life, to preserve and develop one's ethnic, cultural and linguistic heritage, to publicly profess one's religion, to be recognized and treated in all circumstances according to one's dignity as a human being.

These rights are concretely employed in the concept of universal common good, which includes the whole family of peoples, beyond every nationalistic egoism. The right to emigrate must be considered in this context. The Church recognizes this right in every human person, in its dual aspect of the possibility to leave one's country and the possibility to enter another country to look for better conditions of life. Certainly, the exercise of such a right is to be regulated, because practicing it indiscriminately may do harm and be detrimental to the common good of the community that receives the migrant. Before the manifold interests that are interwoven side by side with the laws of the individual countries, it is necessary to have international norms that are capable of regulating everyone's rights, so as to prevent unilateral decisions that are harmful to the weakest.

In this regard, in the Message for Migrants' Day of 1993, I called to mind that although it is true that highly developed countries are not always able to assimilate all those who emigrate, nonetheless it should be pointed out that the criterion for determining the level that can be sustained cannot be based solely on

protecting their own prosperity, while failing to take into consideration the needs of persons who are tragically forced to ask for hospitality.

4. Through her own pastoral activity, the Church tries her best not let migrants lack the light and the support of the Gospel. In the course of time, her attention towards Catholics who were leaving their country increased. Most of all towards the end of the XIX century, huge masses of Catholic migrants left Europe and navigated across the oceans. Sometimes, they found themselves in conditions that endangered their faith because of the lack of priests and structures. Not knowing the local language, and therefore unable to take advantage of the ordinary pastoral care of the adopted country, they were abandoned to themselves.

Thus, migration was in fact a danger for the faith, and that caused concern in many pastors who, in some cases, even reached the point of discouraging its practice. Later on, however, it became clear that the phenomenon could not be stopped. Thus the Church sought to introduce adequate forms of pastoral action, foreseeing that migration could become an effective way of spreading the faith in other countries. Based on the experience made in the course of the years, the Church later developed an organic pastoral care for emigrants and emanated the Apostolic Constitution *Exsul Familia Nazarethana* in 1952. Referring to migrants, it affirms that *it is necessary to see to it that they receive the same pastoral care and assistance enjoyed by the local Christians*, by adapting the structure provided by ordinary pastoral care for the preservation and growth of the faith of the baptized faithful, to the Catholic migrant's situation.

Subsequently, the II Vatican Council tackled the migration phenomenon in its various expressions: immigrants, emigrants, refugees, exiles, foreign students, put together, from the pastoral point of view, into the category of those who dwell outside their

own country and therefore *cannot take advantage of ordinary pastoral care*. They are described as the faithful who, because they live outside their own country or nation, need specific assistance through a priest who speaks their own language.

We move on from considering the faith that is in danger to more aptly considering the right of the emigrant, to the respect for one's cultural heritage even in pastoral care. From this perspective, the limit placed by *Exsul Familia* of giving pastoral assistance only up to the third generation no longer holds, and the right of migrants to receive assistance as long as real need continues to exist, is affirmed.

In effect, migrants do not represent a category comparable to those that make up the parish population — children, youth, married people, laborers, employees, etc. — who are homogeneous in culture and language. They belong to another community, which should receive a pastoral care that bears similarities with that in the country of origin in terms of respect of the cultural heritage, the need for a priest of the same tongue and the need for permanent specific structures. It is necessary to have a stable, personalized and communitarian care of souls, capable of helping the Catholic faithful at a time of emergency, up to their incorporation into the local Church, when they will be in the position to take advantage of the ordinary ministry of priests in the territorial parish.

5. These principles were included in the canonical regulations in force, which have incorporated the pastoral care for migrants in the ordinary pastoral care. Over and above the individual norms, and also as far as the pastoral care of human mobility is concerned, what characterizes the new Code is the ecclesiological inspiration of Vatican II underlying it.

The pastoral care of migrants has thus become an institutionalized activity, addressed to the faithful, considered not so much

as individuals, but as members of a particular community for which the Church organizes a specific pastoral service. However, this service is, by its very nature, temporary and transitory, although the law does not set a definite time for its cessation. The organizational structure of such a service is not a substitution but is cumulative with respect to the territorial parochial care, which it is expected to join sooner or later. In fact, although the pastoral care of migrants takes into account the fact that a given community has its own tongue and culture, which cannot be ignored in daily apostolic work, it does not intend to make their preservation and development its specific objective.

6. History shows that in those cases wherein the Catholic faithful were accompanied during their moved to other countries, they did not only preserve their faith, but also found a fertile soil to deepen it, personalize it and bear witness to it through their lives. In the course of the centuries, migration represented a constant means of proclaiming the Christian message in entire regions. Today the picture of migration is radically changing: on one hand, the flow of Catholic migrants is decreasing; on the other hand, there is an increasing flow of non-Christian migrants, who settle in countries where the population is Catholic by majority.

In the Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, I called to mind the task of the Church with respect to non-Christian migrants, underlining that by settling down, they create new occasions for contacts and cultural exchanges. These urge the Christian community to welcome, to dialogue, to help and towards fraternity. This presupposes a deeper awareness of the importance of the Catholic doctrine on non-Christian religions (cfr. Decl. *Nostra Aetate*), so as to be able to undertake an attentive, constant and respectful interreligious dialogue as a means of mutual knowledge and enrichment. "In the light of the economy of salvation," I wrote in the aforementioned Encyclical *Redemptoris missio*, "the Church sees no conflict

between proclaiming Christ and engaging in inter-religious dialogue. Instead she feels the need to link the two in the context of her mission *ad gentes*. These two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness; therefore they should not be confused, manipulated or regarded as identical as though they were interchangeable" (no. 55).

7. The presence of non-Christian immigrants in countries of ancient Christianity represents a challenge to the Church communities. The phenomenon continues to activate charity in the Church, in terms of welcome and aid for these brothers and sisters in their search for work and housing. Somehow, this action is quite similar to what many missionaries are doing in mission lands. They take care of the sick, the poor, the illiterate. This is the disciple's way: he responds to the expectations and necessities of the neighbor in need, although the fundamental aim of his mission is the proclamation of Christ and his Gospel. He knows that the proclamation of Jesus is the first act of charity towards the human person, over and above any gesture of solidarity, however generous it may be. There is no true evangelization, in fact, "if the name, the teaching, the life, the promises, the kingdom and the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God are not proclaimed." (Ap. Exhort. *Evangelii nuntiandi*, 22).

Sometimes, due to an environment dominated by growing religious relativism and indifferentism, it is difficult for the spiritual dimension of charitable undertakings to emerge. Some people fear that doing charity in view of evangelization could expose them to the accusation of proselytism. Proclaiming and bearing witness to the Gospel of charity constitutes the connective tissue of the mission towards migrants (cfr. Ap. Lett. *Novo millennio ineunte*, 56).

At this point, I would like to pay homage to the many apostles who have consecrated their existence to this missionary task. I would also like to recall the efforts that the Church has exerted

to meet the expectations of migrants. Among them, I am pleased to mention the *International Catholic Migration Commission*, which will be celebrating the 50th anniversary of its foundation in 2001. In fact, it was instituted in 1951, by initiative of the then Substitute at the Secretariat of State, Msgr. Giovanni Battista Montini. It intended to offer a response to the exigencies of those involved in migratory movements, provoked by the need to re-propose the production machinery, which was damaged by the war, and the tragic situation in which entire populations found themselves. They were forced to move due to the new geopolitical order dictated by the winners. The association's fifty years of history, with the modifications adopted in order to cope better with changing situations, give witness to how various, attentive and substantial were its activities. Speaking at its inaugural session held on 5 June 1951, the future Pope Paul VI dwelt on the necessity to demolish the obstacles that prevented migration, so as to give the unemployed the possibility to work and the homeless a shelter. He added that the newborn International Commission for Migration's cause was the very cause of Christ himself. These words have entirely preserved their relevance.

As I give thanks to the Lord for the service it has rendered, I wish that the said Commission would carry on its commitment of attention and aid to refugees and migrants, with a vigor that becomes more and more concerned, the more difficult and uncertain the conditions of these categories of persons appear to be.

8. Today, the proclamation of the gospel of charity to the vast and diversified world of migrants implies a particular attention to the cultural environment. For many persons, going to a foreign country means encountering ways of life and thinking that is foreign to them, that produce different reactions. Cities and nations increasingly present multiethnic and multicultural communities. This is a great challenge for Christians, too. A serene reading of

this new situation highlights many values that merit to be greatly appreciated. The Holy Spirit is not conditioned by ethnic groups or cultures. He enlightens and inspires people through many mysterious ways. Through various paths, he brings everyone close to salvation, to Jesus, the Word incarnate, who is "the fulfillment of the yearning of all the world's religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion" (Ap. Lett. *Tertio millennio adveniente*, 6).

This reading will surely help the non-Christian migrant see his own religiosity as a strong element of cultural identity, and at the same time it will make it possible for him to discover the values of the Christian faith. To this end, the collaboration of the local Churches' and missionaries who know the immigrants' culture will be useful more than ever. This means establishing links between the community of migrants and those of the countries of origin, and at the same time informing the communities of arrival regarding the cultures and the religions of the immigrants, and the reasons that have caused them to emigrate.

It is important to help the community of arrival not only in being open to charitable hospitality but also to a meeting, collaboration and exchange. Furthermore, it is opportune to open the way to pastoral agents who, from the countries of origin, come to the countries of immigration to work among their fellow countrymen. It would be very useful to institute for them centers of welcome that would prepare them for their new task.

9. This enriching intercultural and inter-religious dialogue presupposes a climate that is permeated with mutual trust and respects religious freedom. Among the sectors to be illuminated by the light of Christ therefore is freedom, particularly religious freedom, which is still at times limited or restricted. It is the premise and guarantee of every other authentic form of freedom. "Religious freedom" — I wrote in *Redemptoris Missio* — "is not a question

of the religion of the majority or the minority, but of an inalienable right of each and every human person" (no. 39).

Freedom is a constitutive dimension of the Christian faith itself, since it is not a transmission of human traditions, or a point of arrival of philosophical discussion, but a free gift of God, which is communicated with due respect for the human conscience. It is the Lord who acts efficaciously through his Spirit; it is He who is the true protagonist. People are instruments that He uses, to each of whom He assigns a singular role.

The Gospel is for everyone. No one is excluded from the possibility of participating in the joy of the divine Kingdom. The mission of the Church today is exactly that of giving every human being, regardless of culture or race, the concrete possibility of meeting Christ. I wholeheartedly wish that this possibility be offered to all migrants and for this, I assure my prayers.

I entrust the commitment and the generous intentions of those who take care of migrants, to Mary, the Mother of Jesus, humble Servant of the Lord, who lived the pains of migration and exile. In the new millennium, may She be the guide of migrants towards Him who is "the real light that gives light to everyone" (*Jn* 1:9).

With these wishes, I wholeheartedly impart to all agents in this important field of pastoral action a special Apostolic Blessing.



# **The Prophetic Path to the New Millennium through Social Advocacy\***

**FABC-OHD**

## **1. Background and introduction**

1.1 This Consultation organized by the Office of Human Development of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences held at the Redemptorist Centre in Pattaya, Thailand from the 28th of August to the 1st of September 2000, brought together 57 participants from 13 countries in Asia and from Australia.

1.2 This gathering made up of Bishops, Priests, Religious and Lay Women and Men consisted of those already involved in the work of advocacy for Justice and Peace and very specially in the defense and promotion of human rights. This was an opportunity to living, praying and planning together in order to share the insights and the wealth of our experiences.

\* Summary Report of the Consultation on Advocacy for Justice and Peace in the 21st Century, August 28 - September 1, 2000, Pattaya, Thailand.

## 2. Rationale for the Consultation

2.1 This Consultation has to be seen in the context of the Jubilee Year 2000 celebrations. The Jubilee of Hope for a new millennium was in keeping with the call of our Holy Father to ensure that Jesus Christ will be the source of our inspirations. "Behold, I have come to make all the whole of creation new". The FABC began the preparations for the Jubilee Year 2000 in a special way with the preparations for the Synod of Bishops. The Office was privileged in making preparations and seeing to the implementation of the Colloquium on the Church in Asia in the 21st Century in 1997. It was this Colloquium that enabled us to examine more deeply the impact of the process of globalization on the lives of our people, nations and as well as the Church. It was with these insights that we sharpened our Vision of A New Way of Being Church in Asia. With our Asian insights and human aspirations we journeyed with the Universal Church and especially with our Holy Father Pope John Paul II to reflect more deeply on our Mission of Love and Service in the context of Asia. As a result of this process, we were given the Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Asia* — a gift to Asia, the fruit of our collaborative labor of love, for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus. The Synod of Asia has given us a new impetus to move with a new missionary zeal to make Jesus known and loved by the people of Asia.

2.2 Following the Synod on Asia, the Asian Church moved towards the 7th Plenary Assembly of the FABC. We came to the realization that the Mission of Love and Service in Asia will only be possible in and through A Renewed Church. This Consultation aimed at bringing together two very vital areas of concern that have emerged in the recent past namely Advocacy and Justice and Peace. It had also the task of bringing together the constitutives part of the People of God in Asia, namely the Bishops, Clergy, Religious and Laity based on our fundamental belief that this is the true

meaning of Church as Communion. We are all aware that it is this inner union and oneness among ourselves as the followers of Jesus that will animate our sense of responsibility and solidarity with the whole human family.

### **3. Theological Reflections on Advocacy**

3.1 The proclamation of Jesus that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" is our reason and our mission of advocacy today. It has its source and apex in the Spirit of Jesus that we have yet to discover more fully in our personal and communitarian lives.

3.2 An integral and Trinitarian spirituality will give us the insights to see more clearly the plan of the Father for our world and work with the Spirit of Jesus for the new Kingdom of the Father that Jesus came to build.

3.3 The challenge of journeying together as an Easter People calls a revitalized sense of our contemplative nature of our vocation especially in the area of advocacy for the promotion of justice and peace;

3.4 The core and the heart of the renewal that the Church is being called to undertake in the new millennium seems possible only when there is a new missionary zeal to speak through advocacy and confront the world in need of a radical transformation.

3.5 This calls us to an inner transformation, so that we will be able to speak the truths of the Gospel with courage and wisdom. In the midst of acceptance of falsehood and ambiguity we need to speak with a certain audibility and credibility.

3.6 To be able to speak the truth about reality today calls for a process of deep discernment that can come under the guidance of the life-giving Spirit of Jesus. It is this inspiration of our faith that moves us through our Words and our Works to communicate to the world around us a new path to the future.

3.7 Most importantly, it is in and through our lives that we are called to advocate a new message for a fuller life in Jesus for the life of the world. No. 3 of the Final Statement of 7th Plenary Assembly conveys this very clearly: *"A movement toward deep inferiority so that the Church becomes a deeply praying community whose contemplation is inserted in the context of our time and the cultures of our peoples today. Integrated into everyday life, authentic prayer has to engender in Christians a clear witness of service and love. [IIFABC Plenary Assembly, Calcutta, India, 1978; FAPA, pp. 31-34]*

3.8 In the context of the challenges today and the pain and sorrows that our peoples have to bear with each day, there is no doubt that the Gospel needs to be proclaimed even more clearly and loudly and without ceasing. If the Proclamation of the Gospel is the goal of the Church then Advocacy for Justice and Peace is our path to God's Kingdom of Harmony and Solidarity.

3.9 We can only proclaim Jesus credibly if we are also ready to seriously confront the ways and thinking and acting that are dominant in the world today.

3.10 Advocacy today is the ability to articulate the Good News of Jesus in an audible and credible way today to the people of this generation and age and brings with it a message that gives a more humanizing meaning to their lives.

3.11 To be able to speak the truth calls for a movement away from the culture of silence to a culture of advocacy. To advocate therefore lies in our ability to speak from the heart and with one voice as Church. In the midst of noise and meaningless words, we need to be promoters of words of wisdom that comes from the vital sources of an inner life that will be transformed to every facet of life.

3.12 To promote greater participation and democracy in society we need to examine the meaning of freedom and co-responsibility, in the area of economic and social injustices. The Jubilee Biblical theology gives us some new insights.

3.13 We are being called to promote a culture of solidarity and compassion in the area of violence and war by being advocates of peace and harmony. It calls for a culture that protects life, promotes human dignity, fosters human rights, preserves God's creation, and builds peace founded on justice.

3.14 Dialogue with the World of Asia and Discernment as Church in the light of the Gospel will lead us to be a Prophetic Church. It is a process of Dialogue-Discernment-Deeds.

#### **4. SOME EMERGING SIGNS OF HOPE IN ASIA**

4.1 We notice that more and more people are becoming aware of their rights. In fact there is a growing awakening among the voiceless and the powerless people of Asia to raise their voices, to state their claims to live with human dignity. This is a good sign. We hope that this awakening leads the masses to organize themselves into a movement and to mobilize support for the cause of the voiceless and the powerless in building a just society.

4.2 There is also a growing concern among the various groups and people's movements to strengthen the civil societies to promote the rights of the people vis-a-vis the oppressive and exploitation tendencies of globalization and competitive global market economy.

4.3 The increasing numbers of networks of solidarity and communication between committed groups, NGOs, people's movements and the Church based organization is encouraging. It is possible now to make a consolidated effort to create a new and just-society based on the values promoted by Jesus and the Church.

4.4 It is a good sign that a great number of people and religious leaders feel the need of inter-religious co-operation and dialogue to promote peace and harmony among the people. Inter-religious dialogue, inter-cultural solidarity at all levels would certainly strengthen the effort taken to promote the human rights of all peoples, regardless of caste, color and religion.

4.5 There is also the avid search for an Asian Spirituality built on people's resources, faith and religious experiences is now seen as a felt need. Our faith, in order to be genuine and effective, needs to go along with the reading of the signs of the times. God continues to manifest himself and his will, and we can experience him and discern his will by reading the signs in history. It also becomes necessary that his Word (Scripture) is read in the light of Asian realities taking into consideration, of course, the Asian religious experiences. This Asian Spirituality involves the whole person: a deep interiority in outreach of service, love, peace and harmony.

4.6 The holistic formation and growing numbers of the Basic Christian Communities or small communities in many parts of Asia is very much consoling. We hope that they become important means for promoting critical solid consciousness in the Church as well as in society.

## **5. SOME NEW INSIGHTS ON CHURCH AND ASIAN REALITIES**

5.1 Many individuals and communities are standing up for their rights in new and creative ways. The right to walk versus the right to work (hawkers and pedestrians in India) is one example of clashes among people over the issue of whose human right to uphold.

5.2 In today's Asian societies, people are moving from tradition to option. With so many choices in life, we are getting less inspiration from our local cultures as we face an astounding array

of opportunities. However, these are not available to everyone and may not apply to all our societies either.

5.3 A major problem in education and awareness campaigns is the quality of information materials. Commitment is not enough. We also need to attract the most creative people, the best and the brightest, to join the effort in producing high quality information campaigns that will make a significant impact in society.

5.4 There are many inspiring models for advocacy emerging throughout Asia — the credit cooperatives and campaign for endorsement of women's agenda in Malaysia, investigative journalism in the Philippines, international student organizations, etc.

5.5 Religious education has to teach justice and peace in order to be faithful to the Scriptures.

5.6 The "minority complex" among Catholic communities is pervasive in many parts of Asia dominated by other religions. The Church is afraid to step on the toes of government and powerful personalities for various reasons, ranging from fear of losing certain privileges to respect for authority in a foreign land.

5.7 At the same time, certain charismatic figures in the Church need to be recognized for "sticking their necks out" for certain issues.

5.8 Asian spirituality has to be a cultural expression that respects other faiths and provides an Asian reading of the Scriptures (Exodus, call of Abraham, prophets).

5.9 Some the official efforts for inter-religious dialogue as merely some sort of a tea party or a facade that does not really amount to anything substantial and does not in any way affect the lives of the ordinary people. Culture, religion, and ethnicity are important.

5.10 There is a need to reflect on the credibility of the Church as it is increasingly under question. In some places, awareness has degenerated to propaganda. In others, talk does not match action from the Church.

5.11 Other sectors in civil society are doing more for justice and peace issues than the Church. Many groups are concerned about getting identified as Church especially in places where Catholics are a minority while secular groups are not comfortable with the Church label.

5.12 Ecumenical collaboration is weakened by culture clashes over such issues as debt relief versus debt cancellation, freedom of expression versus freedom from hunger.

5.13 There is a need to be a pastor to the people in the Asia instead of being a pastor to the Church. Unlike the government whose services often do not reach remote places, the Church is in every corner of Asia so it has a bigger potential in promoting peace and justice everywhere.

5.14 The Catholic Church has been around for centuries and should form its members so it could really have a tremendous impact in the work for justice and peace if it chooses to do so.

5.15 In the ecumenical work for justice and peace there is the need for sharing common dreams so that it will be easier to work together.

5.16 International support for justice and peace issues in Asia is readily available (e.g. from bishops in the US and Australia) but the appeal has to go through local bishops in the country concerned.

5.17 Many politicians are using religion for their own interests e.g. Hinduism in India, fundamentalist El Shaddai in the Philippines, Islam in Indonesia. Also, the rise in religious fundamentalism is posing a threat to the advocacy for justice and peace in Asia.



5.18 Influential groups, such as political parties in power, are manipulating the concept of democracy and the mass media to stay in power. There is a crackdown on popular movements in many countries in Asia.

## **6. MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR ADVOCACY IN ASIA**

In the complex but fast changing scenario of Asia caught up in the pressures and compulsions of globalization of market economy, we have been facing major challenges for advocacy towards a just, humane, participatory and sustainable society.

6.1. In the differing political situation of Asia, democracy and participation of people in governance is still limited and fragile in many countries while in some others people are trapped in military dictatorships and subjected to the inroads of fundamentalism, communalism and narrow loyalties of language and ethnicity. Advocacy for strengthening democracy and participatory governance is ever important and urgent.

6.2 As we know, most Asian countries are engaged in accelerating development through industrialization, business and modern technology, especially information technology. Such a process of development is marked by elitism of experts insensitive to the needs of poor, wary and suspect of people's movements, their voices and their right to participation in the process of development. Such a situation remains a big hurdle for advocacy for people's causes.

6.3 The task of articulating an Asian paradigm of development that is liberative, inclusive and holistic is still an unfinished agenda. To bring together experiences, insights, interpretations of people of justice rights, peace and harmony in their relentless struggles for a fuller humanity into a paradigm appropriate for Asia, a paradigm that is lacerative, inclusive (gender—sensitive) and holistic marked by preferential commitment to and solidarity with the powerless and marginalized, a paradigm that integrates social

justice and human rights with peace and harmony with nature remains an ongoing challenge for advocacy.

6.4 With the growing impact of global market economy on Asian countries, democratic and participatory structures of the State and governance and functions and structures of peace and cooperation of civil society are being weakened and threatened. Globalization is reducing the role of governments and State to serve people and the common good and making them servants and facilitators of the market and the corporate sector. Accelerating consumerism, individualism and competition is promoting an ethos of having more than being more and weakening the communitarian and cooperative ethos of people. Moreover, globalization with its market liberalization and privatization is advancing homogenization of people's needs, tastes, and life styles including culture destroying local and indigenous cultures and life styles. The aggressive commercialization of globalization is overtly and covertly undermining people's initiatives for human rights, justice, peace and harmony and alternative models of development generated by people's struggles and structures of participation. Agents of globalization seem to be co-opting people's initiatives of advocacy for their own commercial agenda.

6.5 In the continent of cultural and religious pluralism, building intercultural and inter-religious communication and solidarity including inter-ecclesial (ecumenical) communion and cooperation as the way of being church and mission is imperative for the work of effective advocacy.

6.6 The local churches of Asia have to embody in credible witness the Good News of God's love in their work of love and service. Only in witness will they be able to carry out advocacy for people's rights, their justice and peace and harmony. They have to become Gospel communities of faith and love and counter-cultural signs in the face of anti-life and anti-people forces at work.

6.5 "A New way of Being Church" for mission of love and service for fuller humanity of people demands that we live the servant spirituality of Jesus and his *kenosis* (*self-emptying*). Only such a spirituality that integrates the way of the Cross will be able to motivate and sustain our commitment to an effective and credible advocacy on behalf of people, the powerless and marginalized.

## **7. RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONSULTATION**

### **1. Formation and Training in Advocacy**

1. Introduce the Bishops\* Institute for Christian Advocacy (BICA) and revive the BISA programme. Encourage more bishops (especially the recently appointed Bishops) to participate in it.
2. Establish an exchange programme for bishops, priests, religious and laity so that they will be exposed to the realities of another country.
3. Organize Seminars on advocacy that are to be conducted for priests, religious and laity at different level. Biblical, theological and spiritual perspectives on human rights, justice and peace be offered in these seminars.
4. Human rights courses be encouraged at the seminaries, theological faculties, university, high school levels. Also to include human rights and justice peace issues in catechism classes, value education courses. Try also to integrate human rights and gender issues into existing curriculum or courses that are being taught or provided by the Church such as the Marriage Encounter, etc.
5. Encourage parishes and dioceses to set up justice and peace/ social concern/human rights groups.

6. Teach media education in schools, critical use of the mass media which is both for audience as well as practitioners; there needs to be a new culture of advocacy for the audience.
7. Lay people need to be given greater responsibility in running the affairs of the Church; in justice and peace issues, it is even more important for the laity to be involved.
8. We should promote consciously a Dialogue of Action and working together, not just words; what is important are the individuals and families that are helped and not the academic discussions.

## **2. Justice and Peace Center**

1. Set-up information center so that people will know that there is a center for justice and peace where it is easy to look for some information.
2. Experts and resource persons be listed and circulated among other groups so that they can make use of them for conducting seminars, etc.

## **3. Communication for Advocacy**

1. Establish web site for all communication and information.
2. Establish chat room especially for the young generations.
3. Make use of the other medium such as TV and the radio. TV and radio can be used also and this can be twice as effective for advocacy by other means. Make use of the Radio Veritas Asia, broadcasting in 17 different languages which is operated and financed by the FABC.
4. Production of video for some local places about human rights since visual communication is effective for the young people and also for adults.

5. Newsletter for the villagers in their local languages.

#### **4. Recommendations for OHD**

1. To provide a list of interesting links so it is easy for other offices and organizations to look at the Web Sites.

2. To share all information regarding human rights issues obtained from Web Sites and E-mail to all who participated in this programme so that necessary actions can be done.

3. To revive programmes like BISA for formation of bishops, priests, religious and laity since the national conferences cannot do that.

4. To list all experts or resource persons and circulate to them, to justice and peace groups so that they can make use of them in conducting seminars, etc.

5. To coordinate sub-regional cooperation for further animation and facilitation.

6. To bring together the people themselves (the community) for a dialogue, e.g. Muslim — Christian dialogue in a very concrete level, not just the bishops and the ulamas.

7. Review the mandate of OHD in the light of the increasing complexity of advocacy.

8. OHD newsletter should be more relevant by publishing pastoral initiatives on human rights, country issues and theological reflections.

#### **5. Recommendations for Episcopal Conferences**

1. Set-up Commission for Women.

2. Bishops' statements on some vital issues should be introduced that others will come to know about them.

3. Information network between dioceses and religious congregations can be built.
6. Recommendations for National Level Commission and Dioceses
  1. Find ways and means to strengthen Commission for Justice and Peace.
  2. Set-up Commission for Women.
  3. More holistic formation of leaders of the Church.
7. **Recommendations at the Parish Level**
  1. Formation at parish level for cell members of human rights groups.
  2. Take a more systematic approach to promote human rights education in the Church.
  3. The Social Teachings of the Church should be introduced to as many in the Church as possible.

# Spiritual and Pastoral Implications of the Apostolic Letter

## *Novo Millennio Ineunte*

EMMANUEL MIJARES

### Introduction

Although this apostolic letter could be considered as a sort of evaluation of the Great Jubilee Year, citing the graces of concrete events of the past year, nevertheless, it is also intended to propose some concrete pastoral and spiritual priorities, actions, orientations and new understanding of the mystery of our Lord Jesus Christ so that the church could fix her gaze upon as she journeys towards the coming of the millennium.

Acknowledging the impossibility of measuring the graces which transpired during the great jubilee year, the Pope felt that there is a strong certainty of a "river of living water" has been poured out into the church, a water of the Spirit which quenches thirst and brings new life (cf. Jn 4:14) (no. 1).

Let us recall that the pontificate of John Paul II is precisely an attempt, through a fundamental and solid contribution of the Petrine ministry, to prepare the church for the third millennium. The pope himself considered the Great Jubilee year as "as a providential opportunity during which the Church, thirty-five years

after the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, would examine how far she had renewed herself, in order to be able to take up her evangelizing mission with fresh enthusiasm" (no. 2). He therefore was not unaware that throughout those years, that there were "marvels" of the Lord and have "observed demands to be reconsidered, and in a sense "deciphered", in order to hear what the Spirit has been saying to the Church (cf. Rev 2:7,11,17, etc.) during this most intense year" (no. 2).

These demands necessitate for us "to direct our thoughts to the future which lies before us." He encourages us therefore to live the Jubilee "not only as a remembrance of the past, but also as a prophecy of the future. We now need to profit from the grace received, by putting it into practice in resolutions and guidelines for action" (no. 3). In fact the purpose of his letter is to offer at the conclusion of the Jubilee Year, the contribution of his ministry, "so that the Church may shine ever more brightly in the variety of her gifts and in her unity as she journeys on" (no. 3).

It is in this spirit, initiated by the pope that we have also to offer some contribution, having a spiritual if not pastoral responsibility in our respective seminaries. Basing on his insights as the successor of Peter, we as formators and spiritual directors could reflect on them, integrate them in our daily lives and put them into practice in our pastoral assignments.

What is the jumping board of this new impetus? It has to be coming from the most important reality which the Great Jubilee year has given as its fruit.

### **The need to fix our gaze on the face of Christ**

The core of the legacy which the Great Jubilee Year, among other things, as the pope emphasizes, is that it left us with an important reality: "the contemplation of the face of Christ: Christ



considered in his historical features and in his mystery, Christ known through his manifold presence in the Church and in the world, and confessed as the meaning of history and the light of life's journey." It is from this contemplation and prayer that "we must set about drawing up an effective post-Jubilee pastoral plan."

Christ's face then who is the same yesterday, today and forever is the starting point of everything.

### **To make the Church a school of communion**

Let me begin with the last part which is usually the first in intention.

For the Pope, the "the domain of communion (*koinonia*),... embodies and reveals the very essence of the mystery of the Church. Communion is the fruit and demonstration of that love which springs from the heart of the Eternal Father and is poured out upon us through the Spirit which Jesus gives us (cf. Rom 5:5), to make us all "one heart and one soul" (Acts 4:32), is an important area in which there has to be commitment and planning on the part of the universal Church and the particular Churches" (no. 42).

"To make the Church the home and the school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings" (no. 43). "We need to promote a spirituality of communion, making it the guiding principle of education wherever individuals and Christians are formed, wherever ministers of the altar, consecrated persons, and pastoral workers are trained, wherever families and communities are being built up." (ibid.)

Consequently, the new century will have to see us more than ever intent on valuing and developing the forums and structures

which, in accordance with the Second Vatican Council's major directives, serve to ensure and safeguard communion" (no. 44).

"Communion, [therefore], must be cultivated and extended day by day and at every level in the structures of each Church's life. There, relations between Bishops, priests and deacons, between Pastors and the entire People of God, between clergy and Religious, between associations and ecclesial movements must all be clearly characterized by communion" (no. 45). For it is the spirituality of communion that "supplies institutional reality with a soul" (no. 45).

### **The face of Jesus as crucified and risen**

How can we develop this spirituality of communion? The answer lies in the insights of the mystery on the face of Christ by the same document.

Let us first pause on the mystery on Jesus which is explained in quite a new way in the reflection and deepening theology of John Paul II. This was also explained, if not for the first time although in passing, in one of his apostolic letters, *Salvifici Doloris*.

This deals with the face of the suffering and risen Jesus. Jesus first of all is a historical reality and not a myth. He is the one who lived, suffered and died. The face of the suffering Jesus, however, is not only a spiritual-theological insight, but it is the key which could make us understand the various lines of spiritual and pastoral action which the pope would like us to venture in the coming of this new millennium founded on an anthropology which is basically human and Christian at the same time.

The Pope asks: "is it not the Church's task to reflect the light of Christ in every historical period, to make his face shine also before the generations of the new millennium?" (no. 16). In

this new millennium, therefore, there is a need to present a face of Christ which responds to the present needs and aspirations of man.

This search, as hinted by the pope, is primarily done by the young people. They have a "a profound longing for those genuine values which find their fullness in Christ. ... If Christ is presented to young people as he really is, they experience him as an answer that is convincing and they can accept his message, even when it is demanding and bears the mark of the Cross" (no. 9).

We have to present the face of Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, not as a myth but a historical, real person to and for whom we should witness. Christ who walks with us and is always in our midst.

### **Jesus on the cross, the key to communion with God and with neighbors**

But what is central in the mystery of Christ?

The mystery of Christ, is centered on the incarnation. "The Word and the flesh, the divine glory and his dwelling among us! It is in the intimate and inseparable union of these two aspects that Christ's identity is to be found, in accordance with the classic formula of the Council of Chalcedon (451): "one person in two natures". The person is that, and that alone, of the Eternal Word, the Son of the Father. The two natures, without any confusion whatsoever, but also without any possible separation, are the divine and the human"<sup>1</sup> (no. 21). For the Church's faith it is essential

<sup>1</sup> "Following the holy Fathers, unanimously, we teach and confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, perfect in his divinity and perfect in his humanity, true God and true man ... one and the same Christ the Lord, the only-begotten, to be recognized in two natures, without confusion, immutable, indivisible, inseparable ... he is not divided or separated in two persons, but he is one and the same Son, the only-begotten, God, Word and Lord Jesus Christ": DS 301-302.

and indispensable to affirm that the Word truly "became flesh" and took on every aspect of humanity, except sin (cf. Heb 4:15) (no. 22). He is one like us, amongst us and is walking with us.

From this perspective, the incarnation is truly a *kenosis* — a "self-emptying" — on the part of the Son of God of that glory which is his from all eternity (Phil 2:6-8; cf. 1 Pt 3:18) (no. 22). He stripped himself of his divinity to be one with us in our nature. On the other hand, this abasement of the Son of God is not an end in itself; it tends rather towards the full glorification of Christ, even in his humanity: ("Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.") (Phil 2:9-11) (no. 22). The self-emptying of Jesus is the bridge that unites him fully with the will of the Father thereby making him fully united with the Father.

This is the face of God that also reveals to us the true face of man, "fully revealing man to himself."<sup>2</sup> "The mystery of the Incarnation lays the foundations for an anthropology which, reaching beyond its own limitations and contradictions, moves towards God himself, indeed towards the goal of "divinization". This occurs through the grafting of the redeemed on to Christ and their admission into the intimacy of the Trinitarian life. The Fathers have laid great stress on this soteriological dimension of the mystery of the Incarnation: it is only because the Son of God truly became man that man, in him and through him, can truly become a child of God<sup>3</sup> (no. 23) and be united with the Father.

<sup>2</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 22.

<sup>1</sup> Saint Athanasius observes in this regard: "Man could not become divine remaining united to a creature, if the Son were not true God": *Oratio II contra Arianos*, 70: PG 26, 425 B-426 G.

The key to understand, therefore, who man truly is so that our pastoral and spiritual service to man could be based on the truth about himself — as having a vocation to be united with God and be divinized in God — is Jesus, Jesus who is on the cross.

But in contemplating the face of Christ, "we confront the most paradoxical aspect of his mystery, — and this is the point — as it emerges in his last hour, on the Cross. The mystery within the mystery, before which we cannot but prostrate ourselves in adoration" (no. 25).

If Christ's face is found in the mystery of the incarnation, the mystery of the incarnation is based on the reality that Jesus is really Jesus, i.e., he is what He is — the savior who is both God and man — on the cross. Although he is the same Jesus when he preached openly, Jesus is really Jesus, i.e., his identity really shines out, on his abandonment of the Cross — the most paradoxical aspect of his mystery since, at the same time, here he seems not the saviour but an ordinary, helpless human being, but at the same time, there, he is *truly* the savior.

We shall never exhaust the depths of this mystery, the Pope admits. All the harshness of the paradox can be heard in Jesus' seemingly desperate cry of pain on the Cross: "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*" which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'" (Mk 15:34). Is it possible to imagine a greater agony, a more impenetrable darkness? In reality, the anguished "why" addressed to the Father in the opening words of the Twenty-second Psalm expresses all the realism of unspeakable pain; but it is also illumined by the meaning of that entire prayer, in which the Psalmist brings together suffering and trust, in a moving blend of emotions. In fact the Psalm continues: "In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you set them free ... Do not leave me alone in my distress, come close, there is none else to help" (Ps 22:5,12) (no. 25).

"Jesus' cry on the Cross, ... is not the cry of anguish of a man without hope, but the prayer of the Son who offers his life to the Father in love, for the salvation of all. At the very moment when he identifies with our sin, "abandoned" by the Father, he "abandons" himself into the hands of the Father. His eyes remain fixed on the Father. Precisely because of the knowledge and experience of the Father which he alone has, even at this moment of darkness he sees clearly the gravity of sin and suffers because of it. He alone, who sees the Father and rejoices fully in him, can understand completely what it means to resist the Father's love by sin. More than an experience of physical pain, his Passion is an agonizing suffering of the soul. Theological tradition has not failed to ask how Jesus could possibly experience at one and the same time his profound unity with the Father, by its very nature a source of joy and happiness, and an agony that goes all the way to his final cry of abandonment. The simultaneous presence of these two seemingly irreconcilable aspects is rooted in the fathomless depths of the hypostatic union" (no. 26).

Here Jesus is fully a man since he seemed even abandoned by God, yet at the same time he is most united to the will of the Father since he obeyed His Father until the end, even to the point of abandonment.

It is here that the "whole Christian people [should] fix its gaze, on the face of Christ crucified and risen and to go deeply into the mystery of suffering and love, out of which the Church-as-communion is born and continually renewed as a living icon of the Blessed Trinity" (John Paul II to the participants in the meeting of Bishops friends of the Focolare Movement, Feb. 14, 2001, no. 1).

This mystery of Christ's abandonment, in as much as it is the fullest and the deepest revelation of Christ Himself, is the one that fully reveals to us who really man is, and, therefore, his highest

vocation — to be in full communion with the Father out of love for Him fully trusting and loving Him to the point of feeling or being abandoned by the Father. This is the key towards an understanding of very human and very divine anthropology and, therefore, of the communitarian spirituality. "In the cross of Christ we find the genuine wellspring of salvation, the supreme revelation of God's love and the root source of our communion with God and with one another" (John Paul II to the participants in the meeting of Bishops friends of the Focolare Movement, Feb. 14, 2002 no. 2).

The contemplation of Christ's face... "cannot stop at the image of the Crucified One. He is the Risen One! Were this not so, our preaching would be in vain and our faith empty (cf. 1 Cor 15:14). The Resurrection was the Father's response to Christ's obedience. ... "Son though he was, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (1 Cor. 5:7-9) (no. 28). The *kenosis* (self-emptying) of Christ is the path that leads us to *enosis* (fullness of communion) between the Son and the Father and, therefore, between man with God and man with his fellow man.

## **Some Spiritual and Pastoral Implications**

Basing on this starting point on the face of Jesus, what therefore are the best indications for pastoral program for this millennium?

Firstly we must resist the temptation of "continual movement which often leads to restlessness, with the risk of "doing for the sake of doing". We must try to emphasize the priority of "being" over "acting"; trying "to be" before trying "to do". In this regard we should recall how Jesus reproved Martha: "You are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful" (Lk 10:41-42) (no. 15).

The Pope stressed that there are challenges and problems that face us in this new millennium. But, "we are certainly not seduced by the naive expectation that, faced with the great challenges of our time, we shall find some magic formula. No, we shall not be saved by a formula but by a Person, and the assurance which he gives us: I am with you!" Christ is present when there are two or three are gathered in His name, in His will, i.e., when two or there are living the new commandment of loving one another, in other words if we live the communitarian spirituality.

It is not, therefore, a matter of inventing a "new programme". The programme already exists: it is the plan found in the Gospel and in the living Tradition, it is the same as ever. Ultimately, it has its center in Christ himself, who is to be known, loved and imitated, so that in him we may live the life of the Trinity, and with him transform history until its fulfillment in the heavenly Jerusalem. This is a programme which does not change with shifts of times and cultures, even though it takes account of time and culture for the sake of true dialogue and effective communication. This programme for all times is our programme for the Third Millennium (no. 29).

The face of Jesus on the cross is the key that opens for us the door of the Trinity which we are all invited to live as Christians, like him so that from this, revitalized programmes could arise for it is from this that the church as communion is born and continually renewed as a living icon of the Trinity.

"By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35). If we have truly contemplated the face of Christ, the John Paul II exhorts, our pastoral planning will necessarily be inspired by the "new commandment" which he gave us: "Love one another, as I have loved you" (Jn 13:34) (n. 42).



This leads us however to commitment in ecumenism, love for the poor, and inter-religious dialogue, since the reality of communion is not a closed reality. It has to extend as far as possible to all because it is the nature of love to self-diffusive.

"The prayer of Jesus in the Upper Room — "as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be one in us" (Jn 17:21) — is both revelation and invocation. It reveals to us the unity of Christ with the Father as the wellspring of the Church's unity and as the gift which in him she will constantly receive until its mysterious fulfillment the end of time. This unity is concretely embodied in the Catholic Church, despite the human limitations of her members, and it is at work in varying degrees in all the elements of holiness and truth to be found in the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities. As gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, these elements lead them continuously towards full unity<sup>4</sup>" (no. 48). Mutual charity opens to a universal embrace towards other churches and ecclesial communities.

Moreover, mutual charity necessarily outreaches towards the poor. "If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me" (Mt 25:35-37). This Gospel text is not a simple invitation to charity: it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ. By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity as the Bride of Christ" (no. 49). "We must therefore ensure that in every Christian community the poor feel at home. Would not this approach

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 8.

be the greatest and most effective presentation of the good news of the Kingdom? Without this form of evangelization through charity and without the witness of Christian poverty the proclamation of the Gospel, which is itself the prime form of charity, risks being misunderstood or submerged by the ocean of words which daily engulfs us in today's society of mass communications. The charity of works ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of words" (no. 50).

Lastly, as a new century and millennium are opening in the light of Christ, there is the great challenge of inter-religious dialogue (no. 54). "In the climate of increased cultural and religious pluralism which is expected to mark the society of the new millennium, it is obvious that this dialogue will be especially important in establishing a sure basis for peace and warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history. The name of the one God must become increasingly what it is: a name of peace and a summons to peace... This cannot be the subject of a dialogue understood as negotiation, as if we considered it a matter of mere opinion: rather, it is a grace which fills us with joy, a message which we have a duty to proclaim" (no. 56). This challenge and duty moreover, "does not prevent us from approaching dialogue with an attitude of profound willingness to listen" (no. 55).

Ecumenism, preferential option for the poor, inter-religious dialogue are necessary consequences of the contemplation on the face of Jesus crucified and risen. It is the pastoral fruit of a communitarian spirituality.

## Conclusion

I end with the letter of the Pope to a group of bishops:

"In the historic period of transition in which we are living, we are faced with a demanding mission: to make of the Church the place where the mystery of divine love is lived and the school where it is taught. How will this be possible without the rediscovery of an authentic spirituality of communion? We must first of all perceive with the eyes of our hearts the Trinitarian mystery present within us, so that we may then be able to discern it in the faces of others. Our brother or sister in faith is to be considered as "one who is a part of us" in the mysterious unity of the Mystical Body. Only by "making room" for my brothers and sisters, in order to see the positive in them, is it possible to grasp how much each of them is a gift for me (cf. *Novo millennio ineunte*, 43). Lived in this way, the spirituality of unity and communion... will not fail to bear prolific fruits of renewal for all believers." (John Paul II to the participants in the meeting of Bishops friends of the Focolare Movement, Feb. 14, 2001, no. 3).

# **The Social Responsibility of the Catholic Teachers**

**TAMERLANE LANA, OP**

Once I was invited to celebrate mass in the chapel of a tertiary school run by a Religious Congregation. Upon entering its gate, a rather pathetic sight at once struck me: a prominent edifice surrounded by massive walls stood amidst shanties and shacks in squalid condition. I thought that this situation could be a cause for either bane or boon for the school concerned. Bane if the unwelcome sight is sadly translated to reality, boon if the situation becomes a window of opportunity for the school to gratuitously exercise its responsibility for these people in desperate need of assistance. The sight of those high walls brings to mind, although by an imperfect parallelism, the picture of a University or a school of learning in the colonial regime. The schools of learning then tended to isolate the students from the world and put them in seclusion where they could have the luxury and leisure to engage themselves in the discipline of the mind. Let the students, then called disciples, be secured from the worldly distractions so that they could concentrate on assimilating the knowledge and wisdom ordinarily bequeathed to them by their masters. This appeared to be the educational imperative that shaped the early universities that

were undeniably concentrated only on teaching, or simple transmission of knowledge from teachers to students. Although we can say that teaching and research were institutionalized first in the so-called *stadium generale*, then in the broader context of universities, teaching was considered most important and research came only a poor second (Leuven, 1991).

The concept however of a university has long gone a transformation. The traditional "discipleship" that depended upon the strength of the master-student relationship had been challenged by later generations of students, particularly the humanists. They gave independent research an important push. They no longer believed in the inherited texts which had formed the unwavering point of departure for scholasticism, but instead argued for a return to the sources. They widened, with their criticism of texts, the boundaries of other disciplines: young scholars who followed in the footsteps sought the truth for themselves. The scientific revolutions added push to the shaping of new methods of research which enabled the scientists to explore and manipulate the mysterious workings of the natural world, and utilize the findings of such inquiries for the progress of humankind. Hence the dawning of the age of technology. Since then, universities are considered not only places for teaching, that is, transmission of knowledge, but also a formidable locus for research, that is, generation of new knowledge.

### ***The Third Component***

But then Universities appeared yet to be standing on a weak foundation which was merely anchored on these twofold function of teaching and research. A third component was later added to the paradigm of a university or any institution of higher learning, that being, service to the community, and this obviously completed the tripod that defines the true character of a university. The reason undoubtedly arises from the heart of the mission of the university

in the development of society, and this is especially true in the case of a catholic university which commits itself to the promotion of the dignity of the human person. Obviously, it cannot realize its mission if it remains in the ivory tower. As one educator pointed out: "In order to provide realistic training to the students, it is important that the university should come out of the artificial ivory tower which was characteristic of the colonial regime." The realization comes from the fact that learning should not bring the person to isolation, this is pure and simple intellectual elitism. This form of elitism puts one to a pedestal and thus isolates him from the others and eventually from the realities of life. As one Catholic educator puts it, "Learning without service atrophies the human heart." Learning in this sense could only mean acquisition of more and more knowledge, until they got too congested as to result to intellectual indigestion, and the power that emanates from it would thus eventually cause intellectual intoxication. It would not be long for the human heart to be affected by its desensitizing effect, until it becomes totally drawn unto oneself. When this happens, we know that the person may be learned, but not fully formed or educated. I remember my mother, who was not even given a chance to finish her college education, powerfully reminding us (nine siblings who have completed University courses), in our moral shortcomings and social lapses that we are supposed to be "educated people"

Universities and other tertiary schools generally recognize this third component that defines their function in the society. And yet for some, the concept may only be limited to some kind of outreach program that is sought only perhaps to legitimize their claim for accreditation (Even our university is not exempted from this). Truly these outreach activities can provide great opportunities for these educational institutions to relate to social environment and be immersed in it, and yet for Catholic universities, this goes even beyond these regular extension service programs. In the words of Fr. Tabora, "the idea of a catholic university or college that does

not play a social role may already seem contradictory. The teaching, research and outreach programs are always situated in the social context (Tabora, 2000). It is in such wise that Catholic universities should become cognizant of their social responsibility, which the Church clearly defines as the mission of service.

### *The Mission of Service*

The Apostolic Constitution on Catholic Universities, "*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*", made this clear: "The basic mission of a University is a continuous quest for truth through its research, and the preservation and communication of knowledge for the good of society" (ECE, 30). It says further "A Catholic University, as any University is immersed in human society; as an extension of its service to the Church, and always within its proper competence, it is called on to become an ever more effective instrument of cultural progress for individuals as well as for society." (ECE 32).

The Apostolic Constitution lays down concrete ways by which Catholic Universities could not respond to that call of service to society:

First, the need to include among the research activities of the Universities, the study of serious contemporary problems in areas such as the dignity of the human life, the promotion of justice for all, the quality of personal and family life, the protection of nature, the search for peace and political stability, a more just sharing, in the world's resources, and a new economic and political order that will better serve the human community at a national and international level. In the inquiry of roots and causes, special attention must be paid to their ethical and religious dimensions (ECE, 32).

Second, the need to speak with courage uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of the society (ECE, 32).

Third, the need to examine and evaluate the predominant values and norms of modern society and culture in a Christian perspective, and the responsibility to try to communicate to society those ethical and religious principles which give full meaning to human life (ECE, 33).

Fourth, the responsibility to promote social justice, inspired by the Gospel call, interpreted in the social teachings of the Church, to promote the development of those people who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance, of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of human qualities; of those who are aiming purposefully at their complete fulfillment (ECE, 34).

Fifth, the responsibility to contribute concretely to the progress of society, as making education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of the minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it (ECE, 34).

While all of them are expected to be taken as institutional commitments of the Catholic educational institutions, I wish to highlight the fourth one, which is the promotion of social justice and the development of the deprived and marginalized, which in the words of Pope John Paul II, must be shared by its teachers and developed in its students. From this injunction comes the idea of the social responsibility of the teachers who are challenged to inculcate the same awareness and responsibility to the students under their care. This serious task, however, does not remain on the level of concepts for the simple goal of instilling social awareness. This obviously has to be transmitted to concrete reality, as stressed in that responsibility to contribute concretely for the progress of society and development of people.



## *Teachers' Social Response-ability*

While we acknowledge the important role of the administration in advancing the social agenda of the educational institutions, we cannot deny the fact that the main movers who would bring to fulfillment these agenda are the teachers. As I have pointed out, the responsibility which is taken to mean "ability to respond" (*response-ability*) to a call or invitation or challenge engages one to do or not to do something. In the Christian context, the idea of responsibility presupposes the presence of freedom. The core message of the gospel is God's call to love, and thus the noblest expression of Christian responsibility is the ability to respond to love in freedom. The social responsibility of the Catholic teachers can be understood only within the ambit of their ability to respond to the call of service to society which is motivated by gospel love, or in a more technical term, Christian charity.

Service to society takes different forms in different societies. In the Philippines, where the poor constitute the majority, serving society means serving the poor (De Jesus, 2000). It means, in the words of the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines, exercising the preferential option for the poor. The scourge of poverty is one social condition which our teachers cannot be blind of. This is the issue which is expected to be close to their hearts since many of our teachers also contend with the effects of poverty in their lives. Many of them, in fact, could hardly rise beyond the mere level of subsistence. Poverty is not one isolated virus that cripples society; it begets, in fact, other social maladies that can cause its utter demoralization and eventual destruction. Both the roots and effects of poverty are of appalling magnitude that a real "war" has to be waged in order to counteract it. Justice as the indestructible weapon and peace as the desired outcome are powerful allies against the enemy, but the motivating factor that lends to this battle an even more powerful impetus is love. And this is what should differentiate

from that of others, the Catholic teachers' call of service to the poor.

When I was the head of the UST's Institute of Religion. I motivated our Theology teachers to take seriously their social involvement by adopting a poor community in the locality where the University of Santo Tomas belongs. This was after all a part of the community service program adopted by the University. I appointed a coordinator who zealously and devotedly did her responsibility; but when she presented the proposal to the body to solicit their support and involvement the response was noticeably lacking in interest and enthusiasm, if not, that of indifference. There was one remarkable concern that was raised: "The project seems to be ennobling and edifying, but are we ready to give our commitment to it so that it may not suffer the fate of others which in a short while have met their premature demise?" The observation was thought-provoking even as it was challenging. Why could we not easily elicit the commitment of our teachers even of our own Theology teachers? Is it because they consider it another burden to the heavy responsibility they already carry in the classrooms? I realized then that a real involvement would never be assured in this cause-oriented activity if the teachers don't realize that it is not mere addities to their responsibilities but woven in their lives as teachers or educators. The need for this social involvement must only be elevated to their awareness but also heightened in their convictions and in their conscience. This deep and conscientious awareness must eventually reach their hearts to enable them to spontaneously reach out to others. Sharing. A generous outflow of what is possessed in abundance. An extension of what they experience in their community. I think these are some indications that manifest the teachers' authentic involvement with those who are less in our society

### *The "Internalizing" Service to the Academic Community*

Some educators label this third component of the University as outreach or extension service rather than community service. While this nomenclature may tend to limit the scope of this mission of service, it brings sense to the fact that service to the society especially to the poor is but an offshoot of the strong and healthy community of educators and learners grounded on mutual respect for one another and simplicity of life animated by charity. This is especially true in the case of our Catholic schools. Our service to the poor is a form of ministry, and it will have a sense only if it is an outflow of the richness of the community we build in the academe, driven by a common goal and mission, the motivating factor of which is the gospel of love. There is a dictum that says "charity begins at home". There's more to it than meets the eye. In my several talks to religious communities, I have consistently stressed to them that the quality and effectiveness of their apostolate or ministry to others would depend much on the strength of the community they have in their religious life. Their "acts" of charity will all be empty if there is no charity among them that should continue to build them up to form a stronger community. Likewise our service to others would be empty if there are animosities, conflicts, ill-feelings, suspicions and utter disrespect for each other in our own academic capacity.

Ever since I assumed the Rectorship of the University of Santo Tomas, my ardent wish has always been to "build a strong Christian community" in the University. This is also the desire of the local Church for our Catholic educational institutions in the Philippines. To quote the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II):

"Catholic institutions of higher learning should not only prepare for Christian community living but should already provide an experience of Christian community. The Catholic school or college is not only a place, but a

Catholic environment where members of the administration, the faculty, staff and the students (and the parents as well) develop into Filipinos who are *makaDiyos*, *makatao*, at *makabayan* and not *makasarili* (God-centered, person-oriented, patriotic, and not self-centered). Catholic educational institutions should be a city set on a mountain and should aim at producing citizens and leaders who will imbue the world with Christian-values. Their products should not only be better technicians, professionals and money-earners, but also better persons who live not for themselves but like Christ, for others (PCP I, 636).

In this kind of community, the school management considers the teachers and staff as collaborators in the fulfillment of the school's mission-vision, and therefore treats them fairly and justly as persons. As collaborators, they are entitled to the blessings that the University receives. Teachers are motivated by love and concern for the welfare of their students and consider teaching as opportunity to serve. Love, however, presupposes justice. And sadly there are teachers who may not even be living up to the basic demands of justice in the fulfillment of the task expected of them. How many of them really render at least the required teaching hours to their students? If we reckon by the number of hours they have been absent or late in their classrooms, can we still say that they are being fair and just to their students? John Paul II exhorted us to develop among our students the sense of justice. How difficult it would be to inculcate this social value among these young people if the teachers themselves are mighty examples of its utter disregard and violation!

A strong Christian community in the academe can be built on healthy relationships among the administrators and teachers, among the teachers and students, and among the teachers them-

selves. I surmise that we educators of the Catholic institutions owe it to one another to establish and sustain these healthy relationships in the academe. Maybe a serious reflection is in order. What transpires during break times in the faculty rooms and lounges? What are the topics of conversations of the teachers? Are they serious academic discussions or sharing of experiences in teaching and learning process? Or issues that incite division between the administration and the teachers, or gossips that destroy persons and court animosities of teachers against other teachers?

In the meeting of the Rectors and Presidents of the Dominican Universities and Colleges of the Philippines, one issue was raised regarding the existence of Unions in our Catholic institutions which tend to become an obstacle, rather than a channel, for us to sustain a Christian atmosphere and harmonious relationships in our campuses. While I do not deny unionism heightens the awareness of the rights of teachers and staff which is within the concern of social justice, and protects these rights from abusive and opportunist management. I still consider union as not the ideal form of association in the educational institutions whose mission and goals are completely different from those of business companies. At stake is the education of young men and women, and therefore the role of the teachers cannot be reduced merely to the level of the laborers or employees of profit oriented institutions. The teachers are formators and therefore they enjoy the dignity and nobility that emanate from their calling as molders of minds and hearts of people. Basic to this process of formation is not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the assimilation of values. Again as the dictum says, values cannot be taught but caught. And definitely disvalues can be caught by our students from the strained relationships that may arise between the administration and the teachers because of stringent legalism that usually characterizes this form of management-labor relationship. Imagine teachers in the picket line hurling attacks against their administrators many of them religious and

priests who are either seemingly oblivious to what is happening, or obviously agitated with their lawyers and ready to cast their counter-attacks against the teachers. In the Philippines, this is the situation that we have to contend with and we have to make good of. I believe that in the Catholic Universities and Schools, the relationship between the administration and teachers must always be based on mutual trust and understanding, even if the latter are unionized. An indication of this is the continuous struggle for open communication and dialogue between the two parties, even in times when reason is threatened to be clouded by heightened emotions. Given this situation, the teachers can best achieve their goals by reaching out to one another even as they reach out to the administrators (the same is expected of the administrators towards the teachers) in the realization of the common goal to facilitate the formation of the young persons entrusted to their care.

In short, our social responsibility devolves first of all to the academic community to which we belong. We are called to respond to the need to build that community through our willing service and unwavering support to the realization of its mission. I dare go far to say that we have to be "our brother's keepers" to one another. We do not expect to find meaning in our social involvement outside the academe, without the rich source of spiritual energy and dynamism that we find in our academic community where respect, concern, and love for one another prevail. When we reach out to others, we are there as teachers, and therefore we carry with us the spirit, the charism or even the blessings of our school or university. When we reach out to others we allow them to share in the life and mission the fruits of which we receive in abundance.

### ***The Mission to Serve the Poor: the UST Experience***

While our involvement with the less fortunate members of our society finds rich source of energy from our sense of belonging to our academic community, we cannot deny that this belonging

can be more strengthened by our social encounter with the needy. Besides, the community service in which the teachers and students of the University of Santo Tomas are engaged aims not only at the amelioration of the pitiable condition of the poor but also at allowing them to experience real and concrete life situations of poverty. This form of social immersion is indeed an integral part of the University's social education program.

The University's immersion program has two tracks. Both of these are grounded on the concept of volunteerism (De Jesus, 2000). One track is anchored on the social welfare approach and provides for students and faculty involvement in crisis situations. This social involvement takes an inevitably urgent posture in a calamity-prone country like the Philippines. The regular occurrence of disasters and calamities like typhoons, floods, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and recently the "garbalanche" (garbage avalanche) in Payatas often leaves trails of hardships to the people especially the poor and therefore these catastrophes become opportunities to challenge our teachers and students to respond to their needs, a response which is necessarily translated into action. The issue is not the mere dole outs which can serve only as temporary relief to the plight of the victims, but the learning experience that our faculty and students gain in their encounter with these people.

The other track is based on the community organization model and seeks students and faculty engagement in long-term community development activities. The University sought to realize this by launching the program *HASIK* (a Tagalog word which means "to sow"). The acronym Hasik refers to *Hanap-buhay* (livelihood), *Asal* (character), *Sikap* (value of industriousness), *hip* (mental capacity and skill) and *Kawanggawa* (assistance to the poor). In this program, each college is enjoined to "adopt" one poor community for social development. At present, there are eleven poor communities adopted by the University. In these adopted communities

various programs of community amelioration projects from value formation, leadership training, to skills enhancement and technology transfer are undertaken with the active participation of the community members. The HASIK program employs a total developmental approach anchored on the basic principle and strategies of community organizing which is participative, integrative, holistic and developmental. The approach ensures that projects implemented in these communities are participatory in nature, allowing the communities to be partners rather than mere recipients of services and encouraging them to participate in all phases of implementation.

The immersion program is so structured that it becomes a concrete channel for learning experience. The faculty and students become familiar with the details of living in poverty. Their expertise as well as their energy are brought to bear on complex and slow process of community organizing, as they probe the problems of the community and draw action plans to solve those problems. In this process, the social issues which are normally discussed only theoretically in classrooms acquire vividness as teachers and students obtain a first-hand glimpse into the daily grind of life lived in poverty (De Jesus, 2000).

The process does not end with action. The experience has to be internalized through reflection which culminates either in journal writing or sharing of experiences in group sessions. It is in this process that the values underlying the whole activity acquire a deeply personal action. It is during this stage that learning really take place, as the teacher or the student gain "ownership" of the value, a belief, or a principle and becomes convinced of their validity. The Theology teachers who were skeptic about the prospect of sustained community service program did not quite understand that commitment is generated from the conviction that arises when one really immerses himself in the activity and then succeeds in internalizing the rich experience that is gained.



Undoubtedly, the experience bears fruit when one reflects on it in the light of the gospel message. This is important when we consider the fact that the social responsibility of the Catholic teacher is not limited to her actual involvement in a community service program. Her social responsibility demands that she shares in the prophetic task of the Catholic University or school to probe into the root causes of the problems of society and to take a higher stance of advocacy on the burning social issues of the day in the light of the gospel, bringing the whole weight of its human and expert resources to bear on these problems. I commend our faculty union for initiating a seminar on the social doctrines of the Church for the faculty members last year. I surmise that the social awareness is already there. What is necessary perhaps is for them to heighten their awareness of the problems of the day, and to read them in the light of the gospel and the doctrine of the Church. This process shall empower them to exercise their prophetic role to take a stand and speak out in order to bring light to issues that affect the lives of people especially of the poor, John Paul II challenged us teachers and educators to take upon this serious responsibility when he said: "If need be, a Catholic University must have the courage to speak uncomfortable truths which do not please public opinion, but which are necessary to safeguard the authentic good of the society." Catholic teachers can be so much in taking this challenge.

### *Conclusion*

Once again I am reminded of the College Building in the midst of squatters' colony. In spite of its high walls, that educational institution has the potent resources and materials within its reach to become truly an "agent of social transformation." I have dreamt the same thing for my university. I am sure that your university, college or school. Being, a Catholic educational institution, can also truly become a "city set on a hill", in spite of those walls. Perhaps it is not necessary to break those high walls because the more

encumbering walls are within us: our indifference, unwillingness, fear, and utter self-preoccupation that hinder us to reach out to others in need. Let us tear down these walls, and we would realize that there is much more in our being teachers than what we find ourselves in the isolation of our congested classrooms. We are Catholic teachers, and this alone rings our "ability" to "respond" to the challenges of our society. For, under the guidance and inspiration of the Great Teacher, we can indeed bring light and hope to the world!

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# **An Attempt to Bring the Concern on Interfaith Dialogue to ACUP (Association of Catholic Universities of the Philippines)**

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**VICENTE CAJILIG, OP**

## **Listening to Aminah:**

Aminah was one of the millions of Filipinos and Filipinas, not to count other delegates from Asian countries and from all over the world, who waited for the coming of the Holy Father in January 1995. I met her for the first time at the assembly hall where the IYF (International Youth Forum) was taking place. The hall was the meeting place of some three hundred selected young women and men from over one hundred countries. The venue of the assembly was the conference hall of the Faculty of Medicine and Surgery of the University of Santo Tomas.

She was one of the few youth from non-Christian religious groups. During that afternoon when I met her she was talking about her experience of interfaith dialogue with the members of the Focolare Movement in Mindanao and in Tagaytay. She was clear about her experience of being loved while staying at the Mariapolis Place in Tagaytay.

Her story was focused on few beautiful and unique details. She was narrating how her host would be solicitous about the food

being served to her — they were careful not to serve anything with pork. Also, the movement members paid so careful attention on the preparation of the water she would use for absolution every morning. In short, she felt being truly loved.

When she returned to Mindanao, she narrated to her friends and folks her experience. Not only did she tell them her story, but she also started encouraging her close neighbors who are Muslims to start loving, the way she experienced it while she was with her Focolare friends.

This talk starts with the case of Aminah in order to immediately underscore to the delegates of the conference the primacy of love which is central almost in all religious traditions with very few and little variations. All believe in love, compassion, and so forth.

### **From Formal Classroom Lecture to Real Encounter**

As educators in the catholic universities of the Philippines, you must be familiar with the methods used in the classroom. Lectures are the predominant ways to inculcate the information and values given to the learner. Other educators may use devices that pay attention to the psychomotor. Still, others would use laboratory experiment as strict positive sciences would require.

I do not know whether there are some among you, who have the privilege of conducting courses in interfaith dialogue. I am wondering what method do you employ to bring to your students the subject matter of your course.

Classes in Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and other world religions would also require certain approach in the teaching of the course. Yet, whatever is in the course, certainly the professor would find the insufficiency of simply employing lecture as a

method. Sooner or later the teacher, as well as the students, will long to have a real encounter with the people professing a religious conviction different from their own.

There will always be no substitute to learning given in actual meeting with groups, who may have different personal religious persuasion, but are open and willing to have an encounter with groups curious and serious about understanding a religion.

### **Importance of Exposure and Meeting**

The theoretical knowledge learned in the classroom is important. In fact there seems to be no substitute to it especially, when the institutions, like all catholic universities in the country, have students who are of homogeneous faith (almost all are Christians), except maybe the studentry in the south.

To think of exposure to a place with people of different faith is near to impossible. The next best thing to do is to organize small group meetings of people who profess faith other than Christianity. This is pretty well achievable with the sprinkling of Buddhists, Taoists, Muslims, etc., in the provinces.

Yet if one think about the facility of movements nowadays, then anybody could think of special program that will bring small groups to places like Thailand for Buddhism, Taiwan and Honkong for Taoism, Malaysia for Islam, etc.

### **Sure Grounds**

Gone were the days when non-Christians were tagged as pagans, a derogatory term used for centuries by the documents of the Church, by the theologians and even by holy people, by missionaries and the whole cohort of Christians who believe that

their religion is the only one positively revealed by God. Even the Jews were considered criminals.

The Second Vatican Council had changed the course of attitude in the documents pertinent to the subject of dialogue between the Catholics and people of other religions.

Fidelity to the teaching of *Nostra Aetate* (Declaration of the Church to Non-Christian Religions) and *Dignitatis Humanae* (Declaration on Religious Freedom) will surely put one who wants to join the venture of inter-religious dialogue on proper ground. Of course it has taken maybe about thirty years before the essentials of the teaching of Vatican II would reach the ground base of catholic fold.

### **Willing to Risk**

Risking or not risking is the question. What would be the orientation and direction taken by the catholic faithful, most of whom in Asia, are surrounded by cohorts of population who are simply not catholic and are grounded in the cultures which is closely linked to one world religion or another. The Catholics in Asia number about 120 million and 70% of these are in the Philippines and East Timor.

Yet the contemporary Popes never failed to remind the Faithful in the Philippines about their missionary duties. The first National Missionary Congress held in Cebu in the year 2000 recalled this constant reminder especially from Popes Paul VI and John Paul II who visited the Islands during their incumbency (CBCP, Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas, Jan-Feb. 2001).

## Course of Action

The second Plenary Council of the Philippines reminded the faithful of their missionary vocation. The reading of the activities of thousands of missionaries, lay and religious men and women, during the council and the affirmation of the contribution of the same in *Ecclesia in Asia* No. (9), brought to the fore this primary duty of believers in Jesus. To be a Christian is to be a missionary. For Mission is the primary concern of evangelization, the prime task of the Church.

The National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal held early this year considers interfaith and ecumenism as one of the main priorities if the local churches are to renew themselves.

It states that: "We shall undertake our renewal efforts in fidelity to Jesus will for unity among believers. Rooted in Christ, we shall strive to eradicate prejudices and to grow in deeper understanding and appreciation of others ecclesial communities and religious traditions, especially the followers of Islam. We shall engage in a dialogue of life, faith, prayer and common action with them. As a way to healing, reconciliation and national unity, we shall encourage dialogue among all sectors of society." (NPCCR Message, no. 7)

## Epilogue

On February 7-12, 2001, eighty-seven delegates from 26 countries coming from Europe, the Americas, Asia, and Australia came together to Assumption University in Thailand to hold a conference on Interfaith Dialogue. Aminah Goling was one of those invited to share her thoughts along with a monk, Hindu scholar and youth. She has shared her thoughts with well-known scholars and theologians from respected countries.

The meeting was organized with the leadership of the University of Santo Tomas with the most generous support of the officials and staff of the Assumption University. Will she be welcomed (along with other friends from different religious traditions) by universities that make up ACUP in the first decade of the new millennium? With ACUP consider dialogue as part of the living of our faith?



# **Eschatology and Daily Life**

JOSELITO ALVIAR JOSE

## **Introduction**

The *Catechism for Filipino Catholics* makes the following lucid observation in n. 2033: "For most Filipino Christians, the major difficulty with eschatology is that it seems *so far away from everyday life*. We hardly know how to think and talk about 'the last things', much less make them relevant and important for ourselves."

This, indeed, is one of the challenges facing the agents of evangelization today, in the Philippines and in other regions of the world. How may the culminating mysteries of salvation be expounded to Christians in such a way that a deep impact is produced on their daily lives and inner attitudes, and not just on their imagination and curiosity?

The *Catechism* goes on to point out a line of approach that could provide a sound answer to this challenge (n. 2035): "... our 'final destiny' is *already an active and present reality*, not just something in the future. We already have some initial experience of the deep happiness surging within us from God's saving Presence — and perhaps of the awful, despairing feelings of separation."

If a clearer link could be established between the *eschaton* (mystery of creation's culmination) and the Christian's day-to-day existence, catechesis on the "last things" might be more effective. It is convenient to show the eternal consequences of daily human actions, and God's eschatologically-charged presence in men's lives. In this way the 'last things' will no longer appear as isolated events that lie far away — irrelevant mysteries, in the final analysis. Rather, the Christian's "now" will be imbued with a strong eschatological flavor.

In this direction we would like to offer the present essay, which points to a possible, concrete way of uniting our view of the present life and of "the final mysteries." This may be done, we suggest through an "overflight" of salvific history. By detecting outstanding "tendencies" in the economy of salvation, it may be possible to achieve a unified understanding of God's plans. Then a mental connection might be made between what is happening NOW and what God has reserved for us in the END.

### **Characteristic traits of the salvific economy**

But we ask: Is it really possible to identify fundamental "tendencies" in the divine economy; to speak of recurring traits in God's interventions in human history? Is not God the supremely free being; are not his actions wholly unpredictable?

At the risk of sounding paradoxical, we maintain that it is feasible to try to discern "God's logic", present in his actuations in history. The divine actions, though transcendent, do lend themselves to some basic characterization. Somehow God's interventions bear a mark, and reveal his preferred "style." Such traits

might even be called "laws (in a very loose sense) of the salvific economy"<sup>1</sup>.

To illustrate what we mean, let us immediately enumerate some "characteristic notes" perceptible in God's economy:

1. First Group. "Laws" of "dynamism"

The principle of *kenosis* or humility

The principle of gradualness or progression

The principle of superabundance or supernaturalness

2. Second Group. "Laws" of "unity"

The principle of "entirety"

The principle of "continuity"

The principle of "nearness"

The principle of "freedom"

The fundamental idea underlying this tentative list is that God moves history<sup>2</sup> from a starting-point (Creation) to a culmination (*Eschaton*). The process is marked by humble beginnings (principle of humility) and gradual development (principle of progression).

<sup>1</sup> This idea is not altogether new. The principles of *kenosis* and superabundance (both based on Pauline ideas) have long found employment in ascetical and theological tracts. More recently, M. Lohrer has referred to "properties and forms" of God's actuation in history: cf. the *Introduction* to chapter IV of J. Feiner - M. Lohrer (dirs.), *Mysterium salutis*, vol. 2 (Einsiedeln 1965). For his part, J. Galot in his book *Chi sei tu, o Cristo?* (Firenze 1977) speaks of the "general structure" of the salvific economy, where God tends to unite himself more and more to creatures; and of an "incarnational dynamism" that progressively manifests itself in history. J. Danielou too, in his article "Christologie et eschatologie", in A. Grillmeier - H. Bacht (eds), *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, HI (Würzburg 1954) points to the thread of "unification" that connects the mysteries of the Hypostatic Union and Eschatology.

<sup>2</sup> There is a "sense and movement" underlying salvation history, says Y.-M. Congar, in "Bulletin de theologie dogmatique", en «Revue des sciences philosophiques et theologiques» 33 (1949) 463-464.

Nonetheless, the steps take place successively and surely (principle of continuity), and head towards a climax (an authentic "Theodrama", as H. Urs von Balthasar says). Its culmination will consist in the re-unification (principle of unity) of God with creatures. From beginning to end, creatural freedom plays a role in the drama (principle of freedom), though it is God who in the last analysis grants decisive grace (principle of supernaturalness).

The perspective we have outlined offers a coherent global picture of God's saving activity. Hopefully (as we shall now try to show) it will provide a useful framework for reflection on the Christian's day-to-day struggle.

### **"Laws" of dynamism**

#### a) The principle of humility

Within the dynamic context of the divine economy we can first cite the principle of humility. This principle points to the *particular manner* of development of God's projects. It may be described thus: little by little, step by step. God prefers to start with humble realities, though the end He seeks is a victory of great magnitude. (Consider, for instance, how He created the world *out of nothing*; how He chose a *nomad like Abram*, to make him into the father of a great people; how He turned *enslaved Israel* into his Chosen People; how He elected David, *youngest of his family*, as king of Israel; how He elected *"the weak and the foolish"* (1 Cor 1, 27-29) as apostles. Let us recall, too, that St. Paul affirms in 1 Cor 15, 42-44 that the mystery of the resurrection is rooted in our *fragile, mortal* bodies. Let us remember, further, that *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 39 affirms that the transcendent, new heavens and earth will contain purified *elements of the actual world*).

This manner of acting reveals that God prefers to base his works on humble ground. The principle of humility may be highly

useful in encouraging Christians to strive for personal holiness and apostolate in daily life, in spite of their evident shortcomings, weaknesses and sins. God can do wonders even though the instruments are imperfect. As St. Paul says: "I can do all things in Him who comforts me" (Phil 4, 13).

Also, the principle of humility leads us to appreciate the eschatological seeds that are present in history — above all, the silent but real nearness of Jesus in the Eucharist. The eucharistic Presence is nothing less than a foretaste of Christ's Second Coming.

b) the principle of gradualness

Intimately related to the principle of humility is the principle of gradualness. It may be formulated thus: from small beginnings God elaborates results in a stepwise fashion. Let us recall Jesus' teachings on the Kingdom, expressed as parables of growth: of the mustard seed; of the leaven; of the sower's seeds. The Kingdom, our Lord reveals, is not destined to be accomplished in a single sweep of the divine hand; rather, it "arrives" gradually: "first the blade; then the ear; then the full grain in the ear" (Mk 4, 28).

This gradual, "lengthy" movement is in consonance with the historical condition of man. Time appears, in this perspective, as the context for spiritual growth.

What are the vital implications of this principle? In the first place, it tells us of the deep meaning of the virtue of patience. This virtue lets us appreciate the mysterious but wise pace God sets for the course of events, and lets us understand a little why God sometimes seems to "delay" granting us victories. It leads us to a fuller abandonment to God's fatherly designs for us, and to see setbacks as part of his master-plan for our final victory.

Also, the conviction about the developmental nature of the Kingdom should help Christians, as *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 39 recommends, not to forego their involvement in the struggle to

improve the world, but rather to commit themselves to the struggle (though avoiding the pitfall of seeking a purely earthly kingdom). They should see their efforts at promoting human dignity and justice as an authentic sowing of the seeds of the future eschatological world.

c) The principle of supernaturalness and superabundance

The history of salvation, we may say, involves a continuous "surpassing". God's interventions constantly exceed human expectations. (For instance, He performs such astounding actions as making a world out of nothing; resuscitating the dead; infusing spiritual life where there once was corruption and sin). There is always a gleam of originality in His works.

It is particularly impressive to contemplate God's response to creatural indigence and sinfulness. Consider, for instance, the Father's generous calling to men, to become his children and not just slaves (cf. Rom 8, 14-15; Gal 4, 31); the Son's taking flesh and dying on the Cross, to ransom sinful men; the Holy Spirit's role in resurrecting all human beings, granting them victory over death and their fragile nature.

This generous trait of the divine behavior introduces a decisive color in Christian hope, since it encourages the human being to put his trust in the right place — in God's power, instead of his own energies. The prayer of petition becomes highly important from this viewpoint.

The principle of superabundance, taken together with the "principle of humility", tells us that the divine economy prefers the election of the weakest things (cf. 1 Cor 1, 27-28: the foolish, the weak, the despicable), as the habitual substrate for God's marvels. The low starting-point allows us to better see the "quantum jump" that grace produces, and to wonder at the disproportion between the results achieved, and the energies of the instruments

chosen by God. It invites us to rely on God's assistance. "Everything is possible to those who believe" (Mk 9, 23), for there are no limits to God's largesse.

## **"Laws" of unity**

Let us now pass on to the second group of tendencies or "laws" detectable in the salvific economy. These underline the unifying aspect of God's action. The "tendency to unity" appears in different aspects of salvation history:

— in the unified character of the created universe, from its beginning, throughout its history, and especially in its eschatological culmination (principle of "entirety");

— in the non-interruption over time of the divine project (principle of "continuity");

— in God's uniting himself to free creatures ("espousing them: cf. Apoc 19, 7; 21 2.9; 2 Cor 11,2) (principle of "nearness");

— in God's continued respect for liberty (principle of "freedom").

### **a) The principle of entirety**

The "principle of entirety" may be stated thus: everything which exists outside of God is his work, and constitutes a unified whole. The existence of the multiple, the varied, the composite, in the actual universe is based on a deeper reality: that there is only one God, and all the rest is his creation.

Now, if the creational perspective already provides the Christian a unified vision of the universe, the eschatological perspective accentuates the perception of unity even more. The world produced by the divine hands has, it is true, all its parts intimately woven; but they will appear even more so in the final stage, when God

will put all the universe's parts (now sometimes disjointed) in a state of full integration.

The Christian faith affirms that:

(1) God will work a unification "within" each creature. He will restore to saints and sinners alike the members of their bodies (cf. Dn 12, 2; 2 Mac 7), thereby producing a re-union between the material and spiritual dimensions of man. In addition, divine grace in the saints will overcome the internal disintegration introduced by sin, that centrifugal dissipation of vital energies of which St. Paul complained (Rom 7, 23): "I have another law in my members."

(2) God will also produce a unification *ad extra* of the human being, with other humans and the rest of creation. His diverse creatures will then fit into a harmonic whole: his saints will constitute the Family of God; the cosmic elements will comprise a transfigured universe. (The whole of creation, St. Paul says, now groans and eagerly awaits that final moment (cf. Rom 8, 19)).

History, according to this principle of unity, is heading towards what we might call the ultimate mystery of oneness: "God, all in all" (1 Cor 15, 28). It is love that will finally triumph — love, the only cohesive force capable of vanquishing all kinds of disintegration (the rupture between God and sinful man; the disintegration of man's composite spirit-body; the interior fractures between his intelligence, will, feelings, and passions; the divisions among humans — war, oppression, etc. — born of selfishness; the enmity of man with respect to the cosmos)

What is the vital implication of all this? A deeper appreciation, hopefully, of the value of Christian charity and solidarity. The "bonding" relationship that actually exists among Christians should be taken as a foreshadowing of mankind's ultimate communion. In the measure in which believers foster and practice love of



neighbor, they are laying the foundations of the eschatological "family of God."

b) The principle of continuity

God is the one who is, who was, and who will always be: the one who is always equal to himself. *Alpha = Omega*. This fact, which is an internal trait of the divinity, has a correlate in history. In all his doings with men, the Lord remains ever faithful to his project and his promises, thus imparting a radical unity to all his economy.

As an example, man's glorious final destiny may be understood as linked to the original creation project, by which the Creator made the human being into his image and likeness. Then, too, the final transformation of the universe may be considered as a continuation and cosmic extension of Christ's Resurrection<sup>1</sup>.

The coming eschatological culmination will thus not imply a total break with everything that has happened previously, but will rather be the surpassing end point of a direction marked out by God from the beginning — the blooming of the "mustard seed", which takes all of history to mature.

In this "continuous" picture, all the steps are important and none may be despised. The contribution of each creature is decisive for the development of the drama.

By affirming the intrinsic connections between the beginning, middle, and end, of time, the principle of continuity allows us to grasp the seriousness of world history and every human biography. Unlike pessimistic religious views which prefer the total annihilation of this sinful world and a re-creation of the universe, the

<sup>1</sup> As J. L. Ruiz de la Pena says, Christ's Paschal mystery will finally affect the whole of creation. The suggestive title of his eschatology manual is *La Pascua de la creación* (3rd ed., Madrid 2000).

Christian defends the "continuity of reality" and the actual world's value.

In the face, too, of anthropologies that propound the individual's annihilation at the moment of death and his total re-creation at the end of time, Christian tradition replies: *vita mutatur, non tollitur* (life is changed, not ended) — affirming that man's vital thread is never snapped, but simply passes through successive phases. An earthly life of faithful friendship with God is prolonged, beyond death, as Eternal Life. (Conversely, a life lived far from God's face becomes perpetuated as eternal alienation).

c) The principle of nearness

As a principle subordinated to the principle of continuity we may cite the principle of nearness.

God's dealings with men in the course of history show that He is a living God who "approaches" men (cf. Dt 4, 7), and continuously exercises his paternal providence over individuals and peoples. (In this point there is an important difference with Platonic-style theodicy, which conceives the highest being as remaining aloof from the mutable world).

Salvation history may be resumed as the progressive stooping down of God (cf. Phil 2, 7) towards creatures — through theophanies; the Incarnation; the sacraments; and finally, the Parusia. It is God who takes the initiative of approaching fallen creatures, "coming down from above" to recover the "lost sheep" (Lk 15,4-7). The key movement of the salvation symphony is thus not so much the upward climb of creatures towards God, as the bending down of God towards men. *Kenosis* is the term traditionally used to refer to this mysterious and merciful inclination of God towards creatures.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to add that *kenosis* is only the first half of the divine economy. It is succeeded and completed by an upward movement. The complete mystery may be formulated as: *kenosis-for-glory*. In other words: God comes down to earth, identifies himself with fallen man, *in order to accompany him closely in a glorious ascent*. The divine drama of self-lowering thus turns into a current of glory that draws man along with it. Sinful humans, if they so wish, may share in the Lord's Paschal Mystery, passing over with Christ from Death to Life.

Through the principle of accompaniment, the consoling aspects of God's economy come to light. The Word's Incarnation appears as his extreme way of approaching fallen men, to share their lot in everything except sin, and later to carry them upward with him into glory. The idea of nearness will probably be understood with particular ease by Filipinos, who have a strong traditional devotion to the Incarnate Son in his "proximate" manifestations: as Child ("*Nino Jesus*") and as Sufferer ("*Nazareno*").

#### d) The principle of freedom

God endowed certain creatures with the gift of freedom, the capacity to achieve their end through free choice. Faithful to this design, He maintains and respects this creational gift. The divine economy is thus a genuine drama, in which creatural freedom maintains a constant and delicate dance with grace. God's power shines in this dance, but the terrible capacity too of creatures for saying Yes or No.

Freedom appears as a permanent dimension in God's project. This continuous "thread of freedom" in history is the "risk"<sup>4</sup> that God runs.

<sup>4</sup> The expression is drawn from Bl. Josemarfa Escrivá de Balaguer, *Es Cristo que Paso* (Madrid 1997), n. 113.

The "freedom principle" enriches our conception of both the eschaton and present-day spiritual struggle. In the first place, it lets us understand that final bliss will include perfect subjection to God (cf. 1 Cor 7, 22). This view of human liberty, as Love-bondage, lets us, in turn, appreciate earthly freedom better. Docility to God's will, or obedience to lawful authority, become ways of practicing our ultimate self-surrender to God, a "dying to oneself" and letting "Christ live in us" (cf. Gal 2, 20).

### **Conclusion. Towards a "contemplative theology"**

In this essay we have attempted a summary tracing of the basic traits of God's saving economy. Our experiment, of "overflying" the history of salvation, has, we hope, helped to see better the coherence and sense of God's actions. From such a holistic or synthetic perspective, Christian believers might better perceive the links between their present efforts and their "final goal."

Naturally, the proposal we have outlined is highly provisional; perhaps its main interest lies in the suggestion that theologians, faced with God's mystery, might be capable of discerning not just parts, but also some view of the whole. Indeed, the theologian's vocation might be said to consist in seeking to share in God's vision. As St. Theresa of Avila beautifully puts it, referring primarily to the mystic, but with valid application to the theologian: "perched on a watchtower, from which truths may be glimpsed"<sup>5</sup>. The contemplative dimension should be a source of satisfaction and salvation, for both theologian and the ordinary faithful.

<sup>s</sup> St. Theresa of Avila, *Vida*, 21, 5..

# **The Archdiocese of Caceres (1951-2001)**

**RODEL CAJOT**

The diocese of Caceres was erected suffragan diocese of the metropolitan see of Manila by virtue of the papal bull, *Super specula militantis Ecclesiae*, issued by Pope Clement **VIII** on August 14, 1595.<sup>1</sup> After 356 long years, on the thirteenth year of his pontificate, Pope Pius **XII** issued the papal bull, *Quo in Philippina Republica*, dated June 29, 1951, that provided for the elevation of the diocese of Caceres to metropolitan rank, placing it under the patronage of

<sup>1</sup> Domingo Abella, *The See of Nueva Caceres. Bikol Annals* Vol. I [(Manila, by the author, 1953) 12-14; 345-346. The original territory of the Diocese of Caceres extended over the provinces of the Bicol Region, as far as and including the islands of Ticao, Masbate, Burias and Catanduanes; the province of Tayabas as far as and including Lucban and the contracosta of Mauban to Binangonan, Polo, Baler and Casiguran. The territorial extent of the diocese when it was created, however, cannot be determined exactly. Archbishop Martinez de Arizala of Manila, who administered the diocese *sede vacante*, submitted a report dated July 17, 1751 describing the island of Samar as part of the diocese of Caceres. Moreover, an earlier chronicler, Hernando de los Rios Coronel, wrote in 1621 a territorial description of the diocese that included towns belonging to the present-day diocese of Calbayog. It was only in 1910, when the diocese of Lipa was created, that the diocese of Caceres became a purely Bicol diocese.

St. Peter Baptist.<sup>2</sup> The bull also named the incumbent bishop, Most Rev. Pedro Pablo S. Santos, its first archbishop and created two new dioceses in the Bicol region, namely Legazpi and Sorsogon, the suffragans of the new metropolitan.

The papal bull, however, did not pertain to the Church in Bicol alone. In fact, it brought about the creation of new metropolitan sees and suffragan dioceses as well as the reorganization of existing ones in the entire country. It should be noted that until this time the country consisted of only two metropolitan sees — Manila and Cebu. Thus, by virtue of the same document, the dioceses of Nueva Segobia, Jaro and Cagayan de Oro were also raised to metropolitan rank.

Because of this reorganization, the territorial extent of the archdiocese of Caceres was significantly reduced to the two Camarines provinces. The new diocese of Legazpi extended to provinces of Albay and Catanduanes, while the diocese of Sorsogon included the provinces of Sorsogon and Masbate. As an ecclesi-

<sup>2</sup> Why it took that long for Caceres to become a metropolitan see is a question beyond the scope of the present work. But it should be noted that by 1951 among the three suffragan dioceses created in 1595, only Cebu had become a metropolitan see, albeit only in 1934. Since 1595 sixteen dioceses had been added. Yet, except for Jaro (1865), all were created between 1910 and 1950. One probable cause for the slow reorganization of the Church in the Philippines is the *Patronato Real*, the special privilege granted by the Holy See to the Spanish monarchs, who directly or through the Governor-General, were in charge with both civil and ecclesiastical affairs in the islands. It was only after Spain lost possession of the islands that Vatican began to send its Apostolic Delegate. This eventually led to the establishment of the Apostolic Nunciature in Manila on April 8, 1951. Barely two months after presenting his letters of Credence to President Elpidio Quirino, Archbishop Egidio Vagnozzi, the first Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines, undertook the reorganization of the Philippine church. See Eleuterio Espinas, "Philippine-Holy See Relations: A Critical Survey," *Vinculum* (September 2000) 128-131.

astical province, however, Caceres extends to the entire Bicol region.<sup>3</sup>

## At the Helm

Most Rev. Pedro Pablo S. Santos, a native of Pampanga, was the 31st and last bishop of the diocese. He was appointed bishop of Caceres on May 21, 1938 and received his episcopal consecration at the Manila Cathedral on August 15, 1938 from the Apostolic Delegate of His Holiness, Most Rev. Guglielmo Piani, SDB. Bishop Santos arrived in the Naga and took possession of the diocese on September 16, 1938 during the solemn festivities of Our Lady of Penafrancia.

The inauguration of the new metropolitan see and his installation as its first archbishop took place at the Naga Cathedral on October 18 and 19, 1951, respectively. However, he received the sacred *pallium* a few months later on March 12, 1952 from the hands of Most Rev. Flaviano Ariola, bishop of Legazpi.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The ecclesiastical province is the basic territorial grouping of particular churches. It is composed of neighboring dioceses, one of which is designated as the archdiocese whose archbishop, the metropolitan, has a special role within the province. The organization of neighboring particular churches into provinces has eminently pastoral purposes: to promote their common pastoral activity in a way suited to the particular circumstances of the area, and to develop the spirit of collegiality among bishops involved ... the larger pastoral zone of a province provides the possibility for coordinated pastoral planning and action while retaining the more local identity of dioceses and parishes. Provinces, therefore, are not mere formal entities. They are groupings of churches, not just bishops: the people of the various particular churches have a right to provincial not just diocesan involvement. See Canon 431. An ecclesiastical province is presided over by a Metropolitan, who is Archbishop in his own diocese. Within the suffragan dioceses, he is competent to see that faith and ecclesiastical discipline are carefully observed and to notify the Roman Pontiff if there be any abuses; for a reason approved beforehand by the Apostolic See, to conduct a canonical visitation if the suffragan Bishop has neglected it; and to appoint a diocesan Administrator in accordance to provisions of the law. See Canon 435-436

<sup>4</sup> See Domingo Abella, 228-234.

After twenty-one years of shepherding the flock in Caceres, and having witnessed his diocese's elevation to a metropolitan, he was granted his request for a younger coadjutor who would manage the day-to-day pastoral care of the archdiocese. Most Rev. Teopisto Alberto, the first bishop of Sorsogon, was appointed coadjutor archbishop *cum iure successionis* on September 7, 1959.

Archbishop Santos served the Church of Caceres for twenty-seven years, thirteen years as its last bishop and fourteen years as its first archbishop. He died on April 6, 1965 and his coadjutor. Archbishop Alberto automatically became the second archbishop of Caceres.<sup>5</sup>

Archbishop Alberto was at the helm of the archdiocese for 18 fruitful years. Due to old age and eye ailment, he resigned from office on October 20, 1983. In fact, he made earlier attempts to resign from pastoral duty. Thrice he wrote letters of resignation to John Paul II on March 21, 1981, September 28, 1982 and May 3, 1983.<sup>6</sup> Thereupon, Bishop Sofio G. Balce, auxiliary bishop and vicar general, administered the archdiocese *sede vacante* for less than three months until the appointment of the third archbishop of Caceres.

Archbishop Leonardo Z. Legaspi, a Dominican, who hails from Meycawayan, Bulacan, was then an auxiliary bishop of Manila, when he was appointed archbishop of Caceres. He took possession of the archdiocese during his solemn installation presided by the Apostolic Nuncio, Most Rev. Bruno Torpigliani, on January 18, 1984 at the Metropolitan Cathedral, Naga City.

<sup>5</sup> Ecclesiastical law stipulates that when the episcopal see becomes vacant the coadjutor immediately becomes the bishop of the diocese for which he was appointed, provided he has lawfully taken possession (Canon 409 #1).

<sup>6</sup> Jose R. Rojas, "A Voice Once Heard in Caceres: Sursum Corda," *Vinculum* (September 1996) 16-17.



## The Suffragans

At present, the diocese of Legazpi comprises the province of Albay and has a population of almost one million, 97 per cent of which is Catholic. Its titular patron is Our Lady Mother of Salvation; its secondary patron, St. Gregory the Great. Since its canonical erection in 1951, the diocese has been administered by four bishops, namely: Bishops Flaviano Ariola, Teotimo Pacis, a Vincentian, Concordio Sarte, and the incumbent, Jose Sorra.

The diocese of Sorsogon presently includes the civil province of Sorsogon and has a population of 704,363 with Catholics comprising 87 per cent. Its first bishop was Most Rev. Teopisto Alberto, who was succeeded by Most Rev. Arnulfo Arcilla, when the former was appointed coadjutor archbishop of Caceres. The third and incumbent bishop is Most Rev. Jesus Varela.

In 1968, the island province of Masbate, including the islands of Burias and Ticao, became a diocese by virtue of the papal bull, *Sorsogonensis diocesis*, issued by Paul VI on March 23, 1968. Most Rev. Porfirio Iligan, the first bishop, was succeeded by the incumbent Most Rev. Joel Baylon.

In 1974, Pope Paul VI issued the apostolic letter, *Divino Christi mandato*, dated May 27, 1974 creating the island province of Catanduanes the diocese of Virac and naming Most Rev. Jose C. Sorra its first bishop. The diocese covers a land area of 1,511 square kilometers and has a population of 189,000, 98 per cent of which is Catholic. Its titular patron is Our Lady of Immaculate Conception; its secondary patron, St. Joseph. The incumbent bishop is Most Rev. Manolo de los Santos.

In the same year, the Pope Paul VI issued the apostolic constitution, *Requirivit maximopere*, dated September 1, 1974, constituting the province of Camarines Norte a diocese. The province is composed of 12 towns and 316 barangays. Land area

covers 2,112 square kilometers, holding a population of 400,676 of which 96 per cent is Catholic. Its titular patron is the Most Holy Trinity, with St. Joseph the Worker as its secondary patron whose feast is celebrated by the diocese on May 1. Most Rev. Celestino Enverga was installed first bishop of the diocese of Daet. Upon his death, he was succeeded by Most. Rev. Benjamin Almoneda, former rector of the Pontificio Collegio Filippino in Rome.

By virtue of an apostolic letter dated December 9, 1989, Pope John Paul II, conceding graciously to petitions presented to him, separated 16 parishes from the archdiocese of Caceres and created the Prelature of Libmanan, canonically erected on March 19, 1990. It has a land area of 1,862 square kilometers, which comprises the entire First Congressional District of Camarines Sur, plus one town of the Second District.<sup>7</sup> The population of 415,852 people in the prelate is 94 percent Catholic. Its first and present bishop-prelate is Most Rev. Prospero Arellano.

## **The Parishes**

On the eve of the elevation of Caceres into a metropolitan see, it consisted of 119 parishes, distributed among the six Bicol provinces as follows: 41 in Camarines Sur, 9 in Camarines Norte, 23 in Albay, 17 in Sorsogon, 18 in Masbate, and 11 in Catanduanes.

In 1951, when Caceres became an archdiocese, its territorial jurisdiction was reduced to the two Camarines provinces and a total of 50 parishes, 41 of which were in Camarines Sur and 9 in Camarines Norte.

<sup>7</sup> The municipalities of the first congressional district of Camarines Sur are Minalabac, San Fernando, Pamplona, Pasacao, Libmanan, Cabusao, Sipocot, Lupi, Ragay and Del Gallego. Milaor, which belongs to the prelate, is part of the second congressional district.

From 1951 to 1974, a period of 23 years, 17 additional parishes were created. Archbishop Santos established 12 parishes, namely: San Isidro (Iriga City) in 1953; Tandaay (Nabua), San Vicente (Libmanan) and Mercedes in 1954, Villazar (Sipocot) in 1956; Balatan in 1958; Larap (Panganiban) in 1960; Palsong (Bula) and Sta. Elena in 1961; San Ramon (Iriga City) in 1963; Concepcion Pequena (Naga City) and Bagong Silang (Labo) in 1964. Then, Archbishop Alberto erected the additional 5 parishes, namely: Santiago (Iriga City), Tamban (Tinambac) and Mambulo Nuevo (Libmanan) in 1966; Tulay na Lupa (Labo) in 1967; and Penafrancia (Naga City) in 1973. Therefore, on the eve of the separation of the diocese of Daet from Caceres in 1974, the archdiocese had 67 parishes.

When Daet became a diocese, 14 parishes within the civil province of Camarines Norte were separated from the archdiocese and came under the jurisdiction of the newly erected diocese. Caceres, therefore, simply coincided with the civil province of Camarines Sur and was reduced to 53 parishes. However, a year later, Archbishop Alberto created the parish of Christ the King (Cadlan, Piti), increasing the total number to 54 parishes. The administration of this latest addition was entrusted to the Vincentians.\*

With Archbishop Legaspi at the helm since 1984, the archdiocese saw a rapid growth in the number of parishes. He has

<sup>8</sup> Upon the invitation of Bishop Francisco Gainza, OP. (1862-1879), the Padres Pares (Vincentians) came to the diocese in 1865 to take the reins of the *Seminario Conch jar de Nueva Caceres*. With the inauguration of the Holy Rosary Major Seminary, the administration of the old seminary, now known as the Holy Rosary Minor Seminary, was transferred to the diocesan clergy. In the meantime, the Vincentians retained the administration of the new seminary until the academic year 1973-1974. Archbishop Alberto then entrusted to them the care of the newly created parish in Cadlan, Pili, Camarines Sur. For further details, see Jose Rojas, *The History of an Enduring Monument of the Bicol Church: The Holy Rosary Seminary of Nueva Caceres* (Nap City: Caceres Publications, 1994). In 1998, however, the seat of the parish was transferred to Palestina.

established an unprecedented number of 23 parishes in a period of 15 years! One factor that contributed to this phenomenon is the observable increase in the number of ordinations through these years.

The parishes are: Tabuco (Naga City), San Isidro (Libmanan) and Caima (Sipocot)<sup>9</sup> in 1985; Godofredo Reyes Sr (Ragay) in 1988; San Vicente (Buhi) and Sto. Domingo (Nabua) in 1990; Agdangan (Baao) and Carolina (Naga City) in 1991; Cagliliog (Tinambac), Presentacion,<sup>10</sup> Salvacion (Iriga City), San Rafael (Tigaon) and Tambo (Buhi) in 1994; Haring (Canaman) in 1995; Curry (Pili), Malawag (Nabua), Concepcion Grande (Naga City), San Francisco (Naga City) and San Jose (Pili) in 1997; Sto. Domingo (Iriga City) and Tagongtong (Goa) in 1998; and Tandoc (Siruma) and Tierra Nevada (Tinambac) in 1999.

As it celebrates the 50th anniversary of its elevation as metropolitan church, the archdiocese of Caceres has 60 parishes in 2 cities, 24 municipalities, and 34 barangays within the three congressional districts of the province of Camarines Sur.

<sup>9</sup> The seat of the parish in Mambulo Nuevo in Libmanan was transferred to San Isidro in the same town and placed under the tutelage of Our Lady of the Pillar. After some time, the parish erected in Caima, Sipocot, was suppressed since it was not feasible.

<sup>10</sup> Presentacion (previously Parubcan) is a predominantly Aglipayan municipality. In 1936, Bishop Reyes erected a parish in Maangas, a barangay of Presentacion whose populace is predominantly Catholic. This coastal area by the Gulf of Lagonoy had been the favorite destination of several summer mission work by priests, religious and seminarians in the past. On the occasion of the 400th year of the diocese, evangelization mission teams, composed of religious, seminarians and catechists, revived the summer mission work, a tangible result of which was the creation of a parish in the *poblacion* of the municipality of Presentacion in July 1994. Rev. Gerardo Hernandez, the incumbent pastor of Maangas, volunteered to be the first pastor of the newly erected parish of St. Anthony of Padua.

# **A Prophet in Our Midst**

## **THE CLERGY OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF MANILA**

Circular No. 2001-14

21 February 2001

There is a prophet in our midst. He is Jaime Cardinal Sin.

He is a courageous prophet, bold in proclaiming the truth, steadfast and unwavering in delivering the message of God to His people.

In being our modern-day prophet he suffers. He is irreverently branded many names. He is ridiculed for upsetting people in power. He is maligned for bringing down to the reality of everyday life, the Good News of our faith. Through all this he fearlessly stands his ground, even if his is a lonely voice crying out in the wilderness. This is because he stands on holy ground and his mind and heart are fixed on the people he loves, the flock God has given him to shepherd.

A heroic and grace-filled prophet is rare, like a precious stone mined from the deep. But God has blessed us and put a prophet in our midst.

Our prophet led us through two peaceful revolutions. Peaceful uprisings of prayer and indignation against lies, corruption and the abuse of power. Like a father, he firmly held our hand as we walked through the darkness of crisis in our nation's leadership and governance.

On this day of commemoration and remembrance of our country's liberation from tyranny, we bow our heads in thanksgiving and overwhelming gratitude to God for this prophet in our midst, Jaime L. Cardinal Sin.

He is, to us, the greatest Cardinal in the world. He is our pastor and friend; our patriarch and brother; a priest and patriot. A prophet

JAIME L. CARDINAL SIN

*Salamat sa inyong kabayanihan.*

*Mabuhay!*

*Mahal naming Kardinal*

*Mabuhay!*

## CONSULTATIVE WORDS

### **Cases and Inquiries**

JAVIER GONZALEZ, OP

#### 'ANNULMENT': THE CATHOLIC NAME FOR DIVORCE?

*Since the Catholic Church does not accept divorce, the marriage annulment she grants is not actually a sort of divorce-substitute? In other words, is not "Annulment" the Catholic name for "Divorce" ?*

*I will appreciate some clarifications on the matter.*

One of the misgivings many Catholics have is the one of mistaking "Annulment" for "Divorce." Quite a number of people, in fact, think that "since the Catholic Church does not accept divorce, the marriage annulment she grants is actually a sort of divorce-substitute" or, as you put it in your question, consider "Annulment" as the Catholic name for "Divorce."

Yet, divorce differs greatly from annulment or declaration of nullity. For while *divorce* is a declaration by a (civil) judge that the valid legal relationship entered into at the wedding is now at

an end (the bond of marriage is hereby broken), Church's *annulment* is a declaration by an ecclesiastical tribunal that a given marriage with all the appearances of validity was from the very start null and void.

The Christian tradition on the indissolubility of marriage is precisely the reason for the development in the Church of the tribunals and the jurisprudence of nullity; where Christ's teaching is not held in so much account, politicians and lawyers have in practice found it more satisfactory to provide mechanisms for divorce.

It is my belief that ignorance about the meaning of the words (the term "annulment" is in itself misleading), as well as of the philosophy behind Church annulments are at the root of the misgiving pointed out earlier. That is why the clarifications needed here may come from briefly answering to some questions related to basic terminology and mechanisms of the ecclesiastical matrimonial tribunals.

### **What is the difference between Annulment and Divorce?**

It was just said that *divorce* is a formal declaration by a judge that the bond of a valid marriage established by the spouses' mutual exchange of consent at the wedding ceremony is now at an end, while *annulment*, on the other hand, is a formal declaration by an ecclesiastical tribunal that a given marriage with all the appearances of validity was from the very start null and void.

The difference then between divorce and annulment is substantial: In the case of divorce the "permanent" conjugal bond is broken; not so in the case of annulment, where such bond did not actually exist, for the marriage had been invalid from the beginning; thus the indissolubility of marriage is preserved.



## **How can a marriage solemnized in the Church be null from the beginning?**

The validity of a canonical marriage rests on a tripod or simultaneous presence of three basic factors, namely, (1) Legal capacity to marry; (2) Integral matrimonial consent; and (3) Observance of the canonical form. Lack or a serious defect in any of them renders a marriage contracted in the Church null and void.

Legal capacity to marry simply means to enjoy freedom from any and all diriment matrimonial impediments that either incapacitate a person to get married or render a marriage invalid. Integral matrimonial consent refers basically to the psychological capacity to take a free, true and deliberate option for marriage. Observance of canonical form means observance of the constitutive procedure for the celebration of marriage as stipulated by the Code of canon law.

Since we are moving in the field of law, these things demand external proof. While it is relatively easy to prove the existence of an impediment or of a defective canonical form, it is extremely difficult at times to prove the integrality of matrimonial consent.

## **Has been any recent development in canonical jurisprudence on matrimonial annulment?**

Yes, the canonical jurisprudence with regard to annulment has developed considerably in the last thirty five years, particularly in the area of consent, in line with the new concept of marriage brought about by the Vatican II Council.

As long as marriage was referred to as a contract ordered primarily to the generation of children, and consequently matrimonial consent defined in terms of 'consent to a contract', then nullity, or the possibility of such, was a relatively rare phenomenon. The

reason was that not great deal of maturity was required to elicit a matrimonial consent limited to the exchange of some physical sexual rights.

Things, however, changed when, first with the Vatican II and then with the 1983 code of canon law, marriage was defined as a "covenant," "a community of live and love," and "partnership of the whole life." The old exchange of some rights, although an important part of the spouses' mutual self-giving, became no longer sufficient for the establishment of a valid marriage; the spouses needed also the capacity and the willingness to establish that "partnership of the whole life" that marriage is.

It became clear then that while some people could be regarded as married by using the old criteria, they might not be such if the new concept of marriage was applied. Such would be, for instance, the case of a man who is totally lazy, who maltreats his wife, who refuses to share in the rearing of his children, who drinks heavily and spends most of his time away from home in the company of other women...

These developments explain the increasing number of annulments granted on psychological grounds, specifically on those of *psychological incapacity*. For "psychological incapacity" is the condition of a person who at the time of getting married and exchanging consent did not have the mind, will, and heart for the performance of marriage obligations.

### **What is the philosophy behind Church annulment?**

The Church, following Christ's teaching, believes that marriage is meant to be a permanent and indissoluble institution; therefore, that the conjugal bond, once validly established, cannot be broken by any human power.

However, not all marriages are validly contracted. When doubt about the validity of a marriage arises (normally when the relationship has ended and the couple have irreparably separated), a Church's tribunal, upon the request of one or both spouses, investigates the facts and circumstances of that union to determine whether or not there are sufficient grounds to declare that particular marriage invalid. If the existence of one or more grounds at the time of the wedding is proven "beyond reasonable doubt" a formal sentence follows declaring that a true marriage never existed.

This legal process is necessary for, in principle, marriage "enjoys the favour of the law" (c. 1060), and, therefore, it is taken for granted that every solemnized marriage is a valid marriage until the opposite is proven.

### **Why does the Church grant annulments?**

The Church grants annulments as a way to administer justice to her members. Pope Pius XI defined thus the tribunal work: "To care for the dignity of marriage and to work for the good of persons."

It is a fact that a good number of solemnized marriages are in truth invalid because they were contracted either by plain ignorance, by simple oversight, or by downright malice. Now, the victims of those "marriages" cannot be forced to sustain for ever, against their will, an unbearable, unjust situation. Thus the Church comes to their rescue through the granting of annulment, which for Catholic couples is the only avenue to end a rocky marriage and to consider themselves free to marry anew in the Church.

(We could reverse here the saying "what God has united let no man set asunder" by saying "What God has set asunder let no man put together"!).

## **Are ecclesiastical matrimonial tribunals necessary?**

What has been so far said speaks loudly of the need and relevance of the ecclesiastical matrimonial tribunals. They are necessary indeed. In the presence of invalid marriages, no matter what caused their invalidity, reason dictates that there should be competent persons to talk with or standing offices/structures to approach for remedial actions. These ecclesiastical tribunals are created precisely to deal with possible void conjugal unions and other marriage issues, and they have the "sacred duty" to study the petitions they receive in view of declaring "in the name of God" whether a true marriage ever existed or not.

## **Has the Church authority and means to declare a marriage null and void?**

The Catholic Church, while acknowledging the competence of civil authorities in respect to the civil effects of marriage, claims for herself competence over the marriage of Catholics, even if only one party is Catholic (c.1059).

Regarding the means, the Church has a well-structured legal system to deal with matrimonial procedures. Actually, every legal system has some mechanism to declare in appropriate cases that a marriage which was apparently entered into was not in fact a marriage. The Family Code of the Philippines, for instance, borrowing the words from the Code of Canon Law, states that "a marriage contracted by any party who, at the time of the celebration, was psychologically incapacitated to comply with the essential marital obligations of marriage, shall likewise be void even if such incapacity becomes manifest only after its solemnization." (Art. 36).

## **'Annulment': The Catholic name for 'Divorce'?**

We come back to the original question and our answer to it, after having seen the substantial difference between annulment and divorce, is No. Annulment if properly understood cannot be equated with divorce, and therefore it can never be the Catholic name for divorce. It has been explained that, contrary to what happens with divorce, in the case of annulment, the indissolubility of marriage is preserved.

Such indissolubility is perfectly in line with the teachings of the Church on marriage, based on Christ's and the apostles' teachings, and it is also in consonance with the very nature of the institution of marriage.

## **Homilies for September-October 2001**

**MARIO BALTAZAR, OP**

**September 2, 2001**

**Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time      Cycle C**

**(Readings: Sir 3:19-21, 30-31/ Heb 12:18-19, 22-24/Lk 14:1, 7-14)**

Last Sunday, through the bible readings assigned for that day, God gave us a good lesson on patience amidst adversities. Hopefully, we had learned our lesson well. This Sunday, through the bible readings we have just listened to, God wants to teach us humility during good times. Adversities should not lead us to discouragement; prosperity and good luck should not tempt us to be proud. Both discouragement and pride lead us away from God; but patience and humility bring us closer to him.

Thus, the topics of last Sunday and this Sunday are complementary: they teach us practical steps on how to be in good terms with God who is our Lord and Father. Let us, therefore, allow today's bible readings to speak for themselves.

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

The author of the first reading (Book of Sirach, chapter 3) argues for the need of practicing humility at all times because God is great and will be honored if we stay humble. Not many of us will object, in theory or in practice, to the advice of Sirach. Given our social and economic background, most of us will find it hard to practice humility or to feel humble.

My fear, however, is that we might mistake timidity or laziness for humility itself. Sirach is not averse to seeking greatness, excellence and self-reliance. However, he cautions that the greater you become, the more humble you should be. This might sound paradoxical and contradictory. But this is possible and true when you attribute mainly to God whatever good and improvements that come your way. How do you know you are nearing true greatness? Sirach has an answer, which is as simple as it is striking: when you treat the poor with acts of kindness.

The second reading (Heb 12) exhorts us to the practice of what I would call "group humility." The author then, would be appealing to our sense of being a community, a church, whose banner of identity is that of humility. He would be appealing also to our sense of greatness for having been called by God to become collectively his first-born sons and daughters, i.e. his favorite children, destined for the heavenly city, with our names written in heaven.

Just as there is such a thing as "group humility", so have there been in the history of nations the scourge and plague of "group pride." Time and again, God has humbled those nations and governments who tried to build their greatness on the foundations of pride, without any thought for God. Need we mention names? Examples abound that are relatively recent and frightening.

Finally, in the third reading (Luke 14) we have humility in person and in flesh giving us some "tips" on humility. The practical

advices that Jesus gives us strikes us as something not of this world; it was unheard of and was very seldom done, if ever. And who would have ever thought of doing them besides? They are things like deliberately and cheerfully choosing the lowest places when being invited to formal dinners or other occasions, inviting the poor and the disabled to your own formal dinners and occasions. Listen to this, "Whenever you give a lunch or dinner, do not invite your friends or brothers or relatives or wealthy neighbors. No, when you have a reception, invite beggars and the crippled, the lame and the blind."

Anybody who would follow these advices to the letter would need a large amount of spiritual strength to overcome the feeling of embarrassment which is none other than pride in disguise. But to have followed these advices is a mark of true greatness. Besides by doing them one is certain of being repaid by God in the resurrection of the just. As the Lord has said, "Everyone who humbles himself shall be exalted, just as contrarily, everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled." Hopefully, like the other Sunday, we have also today learned well our lesson on humility.

**September 9, 2001**

**Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time                      Cycle C**

(Readings: Wis 9:13-19/Phlm 9-10, 12-17/Lk 14:25-33)

I invite you to pay attention to the opening words of the third reading (Gospel of St. Luke). Big crowds were following Jesus wherever he went, carried by the torrents of wisdom issuing from his lips. Imagine you are in the midst of those immense crowds. You would be electrified by their enthusiasms and triumphant feelings.

Suddenly, Jesus turns around and says to them, "You cannot be my followers unless you give up all that you hold most precious



and do my will." Physically, they were following Jesus. On one occasion they even tried to seize him and make him their king. Were they not loyal followers already on that account? If they were, Jesus would not have spoken the way he did. It will take much more than just to physically walk behind Jesus to qualify as his followers.

The problem of the crowds in Jesus' time is also the problem of many of us today. Are we true followers of Jesus? Are we willing to give up all that turn us away from God so that we can always do his will? In the first place, how interested are the people of today to do God's will, much less to give up everything to follow his will? These questions are valid because we see around us so much selfishness, greed and self-centeredness. In such environment, can God find himself a place?

To complicate matters, the author of the first reading (Book of Wisdom) mentions the fact that man finds it naturally difficult to discover what is God's will. He proves his point by saying that most of the time, we are unsure of ourselves and make mistakes in dealing, even with matters on the natural level only. How much more unsure we would be and what greater mistakes we would make when we venture into higher levels like discovering God's will?

The book of Wisdom deplores man's limitations in discovering God's will, not unless God himself helps man to make that discovery. But today we have to deplore men's disinterest to do God's will even after that has been shown to them, much less to renounce themselves and be his followers. In that case, how many are really followers of Christ? Like the man who asked whether only a few are going to be saved, perhaps we could also ask Jesus whether only a few are his genuine followers. How would he reply?

Maybe he will answer this way, "Don't bother about numbers. You just strive renouncing yourself to do my will and come, follow

me." Following Jesus is like facing an army of 20 thousand soldiers, or building a tower. Find out if you are strong enough to resist, or have enough funds to finish. Once you decide to follow Jesus, go for it all the way, otherwise you make yourself a laughing stock.

Writing from prison, St. Paul shows Philemon what God's will was regarding his run-away slave Onesimus (second reading). In accordance with the laws and customs of the time, Philemon could apply to his slave the full force of punishment. But no, he must treat him now as a brother, his equal in destiny and vocation, for Onesimus had become a Christian through the preaching of Paul. We all are slaves in a sense, much more truly than Onesimus, for it is written, "Everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin." (John 8:34). But we all have become freedmen through the blood of our brother Jesus of whom we made public profession at baptism to be his loyal and true followers.

Today's three bible readings are a call for us to sit down calmly and take stock of ourselves. We are being called to evaluate the quality of our discipleship of Jesus. Perhaps in the beginning, we were loyally following God, but later on, we have gradually created for ourselves other lesser gods to which we were giving up everything, renouncing our freedom, our dignity, our will. What a pity! We have become once more slaves of sin. We need to pray seriously for the gift of the Holy Spirit (as the first reading advises) so that we can reverse the downtrend of our spiritual life.

**September 16, 2001**

**Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time    Cycle C**

(Readings: Ex 32:7-11, 13-14/1 Tim 1:12-17/Lk 15:1-32)

One cannot forget, neither can you, I think, that classic film which begins with a song, "The hills are alive with the sound of

music." It is intoned by an invisible singer, as mountains, hills, valleys, rivers and castles roll rapidly before your eyes. You could say that all of them, mountains and hills were also singing a magnificent concerto of wordless songs.

Just as those mountains and hills of Salzburg, Austria were alive with the sound of music, so also the three bible readings of today's Mass are all alive with the sound of divine pardon. They resonate with divine pardon being offered, and divine pardon being received. The bible, for that matter, is the classic and gripping story of God who pardons and man who is pardoned.

You will find this theme, you will hear this sound, alive and throbbing, in every pages of the bible so much so, that we can assert that pardoning is what describes best who and what is God, while being pardoned is what denotes best who and what is man. Do we not ourselves, for expressing the same idea, use this equivalent proverb, "To err is human; to forgive is divine?"

In this connection, a curiosity enters my mind whether God would remain God if he has nobody whom to pardon, and whether man would really be man if he has no need of pardon. What do you think? Neither case is possible because we would have to presume that God did not create other beings apart from himself, or that man was created without any possibility of committing sin. Both presuppositions are untrue. Pardoning is the quality that describes God best, and being pardoned is the note that specifies man best.

In the first reading, it was to God's mercy and pardon that Moses appealed in order to save his sinful countrymen. In the second reading, Paul states that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, among whom Paul thinks he is the worst and needs the most pardon. In the third reading, Jesus rebuts the sarcastic remark of the Pharisees that he mingles merrily with the sinners.

Jesus gives no less than three parables in today's gospel to explain that more happiness is felt in heaven for the repentance of sinners than the perseverance of the good, and that it is proper and good to make celebrations and feel happy due to converted sinners.

Again, one last curiosity enters my mind. On God's part, he is always ready and even takes the initiative to offer his pardon. This is clearly brought out by the parable of the lost sheep whom the good shepherd intently searched after, and the parable of the prodigal son whom the merciful father watched daily for signs of returning.

What if the lost sheep refuses to be found and goes instead into further hiding? What if the prodigal son insists on living the way he does, even if it meant a wretched and filthy life? You know sinners have a way of loving their sins so that conversion and asking pardon from God are far from their minds.

However, we might just be seeing in our times a gospel parable in the reverse. Instead of only one sheep straying and ninety-nine others in safe-keep, there are ninety-nine straying souls and only one in good grace. What makes it still sadder is that the ninety-nine strays do not seem interested to seek God's pardon. If divine mercy is a mystery, sin also is a mystery for us and keeps us mystified.

What happens then to the happiness that heaven is supposed to feel, and the celebrations those returning sinners are supposed to occasion if sinners do not return? Would not the angels shed tears instead? Gathered today for this Mass, let us celebrate the fact that God has pardoned us and that we have received his pardon. Is this not a very good reason for us to feel happy and celebrate? We can conclude, together with today's gospel, "We had to celebrate and be happy, because we were all dead in sin, but now we are alive; we were lost, but now, we have been found."

**September 23, 2001**

**Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time      Cycle C**

(Readings: Am 8:4-7/1 Tim 2:1-8/Lk 16:1-13)

If the contents of the first reading are read out to you without stating from what source or by whose pen it was written, you would say I was reading from a newspaper. How very contemporary and uncannily modern are the things that Amos ticked out as the sins and injustices of his countrymen.

Yet, Amos lived eight hundred years before Christ, that is, some 2800 years ago. What does that mean? Those men have barely changed, have they not, at least, as far as being sinful and unjust is concerned. We may have progressed enormously in science and technology, but the human heart, in Amos' time and in our own time, remains unchanged. If changed it has, it is to harness the achievements of science and technology to pursue its evil intentions and desires.

But who is Amos and what evils of his time did he decry, which are also the evils of our time? Listen: overcharging, using false measures, fixing the scales to cheat the customers, and selling worthless merchandize at a high price. It is the stuff, in one form or another, you read in the newspapers today, or hear on radio and TV; it is the daily complaint of harassed housewives and housemaids who are sent to the market.

You want to know more? Listen further: impatience over holy days of obligation because they interrupt business deals; pressuring the indebted poor into acceptance of unfair conditions amounting to virtual slavery (shades of globalization of trade and commerce). The bottom line is the idolatry of money and wealth that led peoples in Amos' time and leads present peoples to commit these evils.

Just as poverty in itself is not a virtue and should by all good means be eradicated, so is wealth in itself neither an evil and should not be spurned on that account. It is the idolatry of wealth that is wrong, and the imposition of poverty a scandal, both of which were rampant in Amos' time and are rampant in our own time.

It took much courage for Amos to speak out against these injustices, as it will take much courage for us to remove from our society the twin evil of idolatry of wealth and forced poverty of the masses. What made it more difficult for Amos to carry out his mission was the state and the kind of prosperity, religious fervor, and security his society felt it had found itself in. Hence, who would listen to Amos preaching against dubiously acquired property, superficial religious piety, and fragile-built security? It was like preaching in the wilderness, with nobody listening or caring.

Money, I repeat, is not evil in itself. It is just that it is hard to handle money so that it does not stick to your hand. In like manner, poverty in itself is not a virtue although the great majority of mankind then as it is now are forced to endure it. It is in this light that we should understand the recommendation of Jesus, in today's gospel reading, to make friends for ourselves with worldly wealth so that when it fails you, you will be welcomed to the eternal home.

To maintain balance in all our social and economic dealings, we certainly have to listen and practice Paul's earnest advice to promote in our communities the environment of prayer, thanksgiving, intercessions and petitions so that we may live a peaceful and quiet life, with all reverence toward God and with proper conduct.

**September 30, 2001**

**Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time      Cycle C**

(Readings: Am 6:1, 4-7/1 Tim 6:11-16/Lk 16: 19-31)

To profit fully from the teaching of this Sunday's gospel passage, it will be good first to dispel any misconceptions that may have arisen in your minds as you listened to the reading, and then to point out the lessons it is trying to impart. First of all, Jesus is not telling a story that actually happened despite giving the name Lazarus to one of the persons in the story, while legend supplied the name Dives to the other. We have here a parable which employs a story-plot to impart a moral or religious teaching. Whether the story really took place or not, does not matter. It is the teaching that the story imparts that is important.

Secondly, just because the parable was directed by Jesus to the Pharisees does not allow us to conclude that it's teaching is not for us. The Pharisees were, of course, the first target of the parable because they were greedy and loved money very much. They had sneered at Jesus when he preached that no one could serve two masters; no one can serve God and mammon, that is, money. But this Sunday's gospel parable is just as well targeted at us who, like the Pharisees, might just be trying to do the impossible, that is, attempting to serve both God and money. In a contest like this, for the hearts of man, usually it is mammon or money that wins.

Now, let us come to the parable proper. We will have to take it from Jesus who, right at the beginning, in a few masterful strokes, described the contrasting life-situation on earth of Dives (or whatever his name was) and Lazarus. Luxury and over-indulgence was the name of the game for Dives in all his waking and sleeping hours; while misery and helplessness was the lot of

the starving and sores-stricken Lazarus, who was so weak that he couldn't even drive away the dog that was licking his sores.

But death was the switch that turned around the wheel of fortune. Now it was Dives who lived in torment so great that he thought he would be lucky enough if someone dipped the tip of his finger in water and came over to him to cool his tongue. Meanwhile, Lazarus was resting blissfully in Abraham's bosom, like an infant sleeping in its father's arms. Again, we'll have to give it to Jesus because with a few masterful strokes he depicts their contrasting state in the life after death. Their present state is definitive and permanent. The reversal of their fortunes will not be reversed anymore. Dives would not even have the luxury of someone dipping the tip of his finger in water to cool his tongue, and Lazarus cannot leave the bosom of Abraham to get over to him because of the fixed abyss dividing one from the other.

Up to this point of the parable, there emerges a first lesson. Riches, wealth, and high-living style do not assure a continuation of their enjoyment in the other life. Similarly, poverty, misery and disability are not reasons for despairing because there is the promise of happiness in the life beyond. Dives could not carry a single centavo of his enormous wealth to the other world and Lazarus left all his sores and misery behind when he entered into paradise. And the reason for all this is because the one had no other thought than to enjoy himself with his riches, and the other was patient and uncomplaining with his problems.

From this point to the end of the parable, a second lesson emerges. Dives suddenly remembers that he has still five brothers back on earth who are rich and lead the same life-style as his before. Could Lazarus go to them and warn them so that they will not end up like him? An apparition from the other world will certainly convince his brothers to change their life-styles and be more concerned with their fellowmen by sharing their possessions with them.



Abraham's reply, or better, Jesus' who made Abraham speak that way, was devastating. Man has the Word of God to guide them: the Holy Scriptures along with competent interpreters and teachers. If he does not listen to the Word of God (he will surely not care for it, as long as he loves money more than God) no amount of apparitions from the other world can change him. The contemporaries of Amos behaved the same way. They ignored the Word of God proclaimed to them by the prophet because of their love for the good life (see the first reading). So God took the matter in his hand. Whereas they have been in the forefront of luxurious living, they shall be also the first to go into exile when the terrible Assyrians come to invade their land.

Let us follow the cue of St. Timothy. He saw the advantage of carrying out St. Paul's order of seeking after integrity, piety, faith, love, steadfastness, and a gentle spirit (second reading). Such a one can hold high his head when the Lord appears in his Second Coming. This is the apparition from the other world that really counts.

**October 7, 2001**

**Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time    Cycle C**

(Readings: Hb 1:2-3; 2:2-4/2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14/Lk 17:5-10)

Written by three different authors, our bible readings today are, however, related to each other because together, they present a common theme, viz. Faith or belief. Faith or belief is that which defines a man. If you have faith, you are a faithful, a believer. If you have no faith, you are faithless or an unbeliever.

Between being faithful and being faithless, there is a space of sorts so that the more you are distant from one extreme end, the more you are near to the opposite extreme. It is here on this

space that we are situated, each severally depending on how near or distant we are from either extreme end.

You are familiar, of course, with the plaything called "see-saw". Now, it is impossible for you to sit on both the extremities of the "see-saw" at the same time. But you can stay on any part of the space in-between the two extremities. The farther you are from one end, the nearer you go to the opposite end. The farther you are from being full of faith, the nearer you get to being faithless. You are either full of faith or faithless, or somewhere in-between.

Where are you situated now in the "see-saw" of Christian life? Today's three bible readings gives us a clue on who is full of faith, a real faithful. They enumerate for us the qualities of a faithful Christian.

Item one: he remains loyal to and trusting in God, even when he sees that evil men are prosperous and powerful in this life, while he feels himself drowning in sorrow, affliction, and trials. So describes our first reading from the prophet Habakkuk.

Item two: the faithful Christian is not ashamed to give witness to Christ by a life of sacrifice since Jesus himself led such kind of life. This witnessing for Christ involves holding firmly to the words taught to us by holy Mother Church, and keeping the good things entrusted to us in the power of the Spirit, such as Scripture, Tradition, sacraments, charisms, ministries. You find this in the second reading.

Item three: his faith is such that, of itself it has the power to move mountains and uproot trees by one word of command. We have this on the authority of Jesus himself, although in his earthly life he had not done those things. But do we need such upheavals in nature to prove that Christian faith is powerful, and has these so far untried powers? What we should pay more attention to is the statement of Jesus that follows. Possessing a priceless gift

like Christian faith, the believer, if he succeeds in doing something remarkable, should not indulge in self-praise or seek other's recognition. On the contrary, we are told by Christ to say, "We are useless servants. We have done no more than our duty."

How many among us possess all the qualities of faith as enumerated by the three bible readings of today's Mass? Such Christians are the men and women full of faith. They are really the faithful ones. They would be occupying the good extreme end of the "see-saw" of religious life.

Although the rest of us could be like them if we want and try to, perhaps it is more correct to say we are sitting somewhere in-between the two extremities of the "see-saw". That's at least much better than occupying the opposite end, where faith is dying or already dead. Not being men or women full of faith, which otherwise is the ideal, nor being faithless, which is the opposite extreme, we can with very good reason, follow the example of the apostles in today's gospel by asking Jesus, "Lord, increase our faith."

This is a prayer that Jesus is greatly pleased to grant all the more so, because today, the tendency for many Catholics is that their faith is on a decrease instead of an increase. For two reasons: one is because they fail to seek instructions in the faith or are not given them so that what substitutes for faith is superstitions or harmful ideologies. Another reason is that those Catholics who are supposed, in society and in the Church, to play the role of mountains of moral stability and trees providing shelter of love and compassion, and fruits of holiness are themselves being shaken and uprooted. So we all must pray with urgency, "Lord, increase our faith."

**October 14, 2001**

**Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time      Cycle C**

(Readings: 2 Kgs 5: 14-17/2 Tim 2: 8-13/Lk 17: 11-19)

Last Sunday the topic of our homily was faith, in line with the three bible readings then. This Sunday, based on the three bible readings, our topic will be again on faith. Perhaps, by talking about faith twice or more times, our prayer to God for increasing our faith will be realized. Just how much should our faith be increased, I do not know. Jesus had said that even a faith as small as a seed can move mountains and uproot trees. If you and I feel we cannot move mountains and uproot trees, then it may mean that our faith is tinier than a seed.

But we are missing a point here. Size or weight is not at issue here. We have the knack of quantifying things even when this is not called for. How many prayers, for example, novenas, rosaries and Masses, for obtaining this or that favor from God? Or, we go to the opposite extreme: no prayers, no novenas, no rosaries, no Masses, and yet we expect God to be kind to us.

Faith does not deal in quantities; it does not consist in tangibles; just as God is neither quantifiable nor tangible. It deals with the mind and the will, which you cannot measure nor touch, notwithstanding the attempt on determining the IQs, the EQs and the like. The three bible readings today will tell us more about faith, in addition to what we already learnt from last Sunday's reading. The example of Naaman (first reading) is very instructive. It describes the road this man traveled from absence of faith into full faith; the resistance he threw at God's loving call and his final acknowledgement of the true and only God. In other words, Naaman surrendered his mind and will, fully to God and that was what made him faithful and thankful to God.

These two go together: if you are faithful you are thankful; if you are thankful you are faithful. We might even say that faith is gratitude, and gratitude is faith. You cannot be grateful to one in whom you do not believe, can you? Be he/she a friend, a parent, a teacher. The same applies when speaking about faith and gratitude to God.

Not surprisingly, we discover that St. Paul (second reading), a man of great faith after his conversion, expressed his gratitude to God by accepting all the stresses and trials of a missionary with joy and perseverance. Also, among the 10 lepers (third reading), who do we adjudge as the one with true faith but the Samaritan who returned to Jesus to express his gratitude?

Naaman, Paul, formerly called Saul, the Samaritan leper, all three became men of faith because they relied, not on the quantifiable and tangible things of this world, but on the mere word of God which came to them in different ways. And because of which, they responded by surrendering to him their minds, their wills, their bodies, their entire personhood.

We are yet reminded of another person to whom we address the title of "Virgin most faithful", i.e. a virgin most full of faith. This Sunday, usually falling within the month of October, should call to our remembrance and invite us to honor the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and Queen of the most holy Rosary. Why is she, among all God's creatures, the most full of faith? Because she accepted and complied with God's word, and because she surrendered all her personhood to him. "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to his word," was her response to God's invitation given most freely to her.

**October 21, 2001**

**Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time      Cycle C**

(Readings: Ex 17:8-13/2 Tim 3:14 — 4:2/Lk 18: 1-8)

I was somewhat mystified by the concluding remark of Jesus to his teaching on prayer in today's third reading. He doubts whether he will find any faith on earth when he comes again in glory. Why did he say so? For two consecutive Sundays, the growth of faith was the topic of our homilies. The bible readings were directed towards the increase of faith. The expectation, therefore, is that there is going to be a flowering of faith, an explosion of belief.

But, no. Jesus, in his concluding remark today, expresses his misgivings about finding faith on earth when he comes back. Is he being pessimistic about us? Is he referring to the ningas-cogon mentality, not only of Filipino Christians but of believers in general, who today are enthusiastic about their religion, but tomorrow, their enthusiasm is all gone? Why did Jesus conclude his teaching on prayer on a seemingly pessimistic note?

However, for me the remark is rather a challenge to intensify our prayerlife so that faith not only may not disappear, but grow stronger instead and proliferate even. Happily, today's gospel proclamation coincides with the celebration of World Mission Sunday, whose primary aim is the spread of Christian faith all over the world.

So, let us take up the challenge of Jesus regarding prayer and reflect on today's three bible readings. I find the story about how Moses prayed charming and instructive (first reading). He commanded Joshua and his armed companions to counter-attack the enemies of Israel and he would be helping them through his prayer from the top of a hill.

Moses prayed holding up his arms, the way a priest prays today at Mass. The story goes on to say that as long as Moses held up his arms while praying, the Israelites would win, but the moment he puts them down due to fatigue, the enemies would win. So his assistants thought of a way for Moses to hold up his arms long enough for Joshua and his army to defeat conclusively the people's enemy. The lesson to be drawn here is that prayer must be persevering to achieve its purpose.

Hence, there is no such thing as instant prayer or prayer with instant results, like what you get by preparing instant coffee, instant tea, instant noodles, etc. Moses held up his hands in prayer from sunrise to sundown. It took that long for the Israelites to defeat the Amalekites in battle fought by the two sides with swords, spears and arrows.

The widow of the gospel parable (third reading) did not give up on the first denial to her request by the wicked and corrupt judge. She importuned him again and again, after repeated dismissals until it was the judge himself who gave up weary and tired. Perseverance in prayer will have its reward in the end, however long it takes. Let us imitate the holy stubbornness of the widow. That is the lesson today's parable is giving us.

The instructions given in the second reading deserve our special attention. Although primarily directed to church leaders (Paul was writing to Timothy, bishop of Ephesus), they also apply to ordinary rank and file church members, especially that the situation of the church today is not very dissimilar to that of the early church. Particularly helpful is Paul's recommendation to take up and read the bible, for it is a book inspired by God, and useful to know the truth, to reject error, to correct faults, and to gain instruction for right living.

Today, truth is obscured or forsaken, error is lightheartedly embraced, faults are cavalierly dismissed or defended, and right

living is given low priority. Church leaders and church members must close ranks and work together to oppose the increasing materialism in the world. In our own respective ways, let us preach the Good News, as Paul says, let us insist on proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not), let us convince, reproach, and encourage, even as we teach with all patience. This is how we can assure the Lord Jesus that when he comes again to earth, he will find men and women of faith.

We do not even have to wait for that Last Day of his Great Appearance. Each of us, after the last moment of our life on earth will have to appear before him. Let us hope and pray he will find us full of faith and love to merit entrance into his eternal kingdom.

**October 21, 2001**

**Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time                      Cycle C**

Alternative homily

(Readings: Ex 17:8-13/2 Tim 3:14 - 4:2/Lk 18:1-8)

The concluding remark of Jesus to his teaching on prayer by means of a parable, has somewhat mystified and perplexed me. I do not know if it did also on you. Why did he say it? As the Son of Man, will he still find faith on earth when he comes again?

For two consecutive Sundays, the growth of faith was the topic of our homilies: growth of faith through devotion to our Lady of the Rosary; growth of faith through practice of saying thank you to God. The bible readings of those Sundays were directed towards the increase of faith. Our expectation, therefore, was that there was going to be a flowering of faith.

Now, this Sunday, Jesus expresses his misgivings about finding faith on earth when he returns. Is he being pessimistic about us?



Is he referring to the *ningas-cogon* mentality not only of Filipino Christians but of believers in general, who today are enthusiastic about their religion but tomorrow and the days after, the enthusiasm is all gone?

Why did Jesus conclude his teaching on prayer with a seemingly pessimistic remark? For me, far from suggesting any pessimism, the remark is rather a challenge for us to intensify our prayer-life so that faith not only may not disappear, but may increase and spread even more. Happily, today's proclamation of the gospel coincides with the celebration today also of World Mission Sunday, whose primary aim is to remind the faithful to help in the spread of the Christian faith all over the world through prayer, sacrifice and financial support.

So, let us take up the challenge of Jesus to intensify our prayer-life, and let's meditate on and draw up conclusions from the 3 bible readings of today's Mass.

I find the story about how Moses prayed both instructive and picturesque (1st reading). He commanded Joshua and his armed companions to fight back the attacking enemies of Israel. He himself, however, would help them with his prayers from the top of a hill.

Moses prayed the way a priest prays today during Mass, by holding up his arms. The story goes on to say that as long as Moses held up his arms, the Israelites won, but when he puts them down because of fatigue, the enemies won. So the assistants of Moses thought of a way how Moses could hold up his arms long enough for Joshua and his army to defeat completely the people's enemies. The lesson to be drawn from here is that prayer must be persevering to achieve its purpose.

Hence, there is no such thing as instant prayer as if we are dealing with such matters as instant coffee, instant fruit drinks,

instant meals, etc. Moses held up his arms from sunrise to sundown. It was that long that the battle between the Israelites and the Amalekites lasted, as the story goes.

The widow in Jesus' parable (third reading) did not give up after the first denial of her request by the wicked and corrupt judge. She importuned him again and again, until it was the judge himself who gave up his stance of refusing stubbornly. Perseverance in prayer will have its reward in the end, whether it's long or short in coming.

What should call our particular attention, however, are the instructions given in the 2nd reading. That is why it is being reserved for our last consideration. To all appearances, Paul was referring his instructions exclusively to priests and bishops, just as Timothy (to whom he addressed this letter) was bishop of Ephesus.

The instructions, are primarily directed to church leaders but they also apply to church members as well. And, given the present situation of the universal church, which is not very dissimilar to that of the early church, wherein the Christians had always been in the minority, church members today will do well by accepting Paul's recommendation of taking up and reading the bible. For it is a book inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving advice for righteous living.

Today, truth is observed or forsaken; error is lightheartedly embraced, faults are condoned and defended, righteous living is a low priority. We can perceive all this as happening in an unbelieving world and even in a society that labels itself as Christian, such as our society. We church members and church leaders, must close ranks and cooperate. In our respective ways, let us, as Paul says, preach the Good News of God's kingdom, and insist upon proclaiming it (whether the time is right or not).

Let us convince, correct and encourage one another; let us teach each other with all patience. The manner and opportunities for carrying out these instructions of Paul, will vary according to the ability and responsibility of each. But the important thing is, to do it now and with perseverance.

**October 28, 2001**

**Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time      Cycle C**

(Readings: Sir 35:12-14, 16-18/2 Tim 4:6-8, 16-18/Lk 18:9-14)

Last Sunday's readings highlighted perseverance and holy stubbornness as the qualities of prayer that can draw God into granting our petitions. This Sunday's readings highlight yet another quality that will make our prayer to God irresistible and hard to deny. This other quality is humility, and all our three readings today point to its need. Our prayer must be humble; it must spring from a humble mind, a humble heart, and a humble life.

Perseverance and stubbornness in prayer without humility, is pride and presumption. It is like banging open the door of a storeowner to demand that he sells you or lends you three kilos of rice. In that case, the rice dealer will bang his door shut to your face, even if you have P 75.00 in your hand. That is not the way of getting rice.

Here, however, we are dealing with getting favors from God through prayer. What amount of money can you hold up to God for some favors? You cannot buy God; his favors are not for sale. The Pharisee in today's parable (third reading) tried to do that. "Look here, God," he says, "I fast two days a week, and I give you one tenth of all my income." What did he get from God? Nothing. Besides, he wasn't praying at all; he was praising himself.

A picturesque expression in the first reading (book of Sirach) says that the prayer of a humble person pierces the clouds and keeps on going, until it reaches God, and it stays there, until he responds by granting the petition. Prayer accordingly, faces difficulties and obstacles. That is why it was said last Sunday, there is no such thing as instant prayer that gets instant results.

One has, so to speak, to pierce the clouds, get on going till it reaches its goal, and remain there till one's petition is granted. You might have some reservations about trying to pierce clouds. Usually, an airplane avoids hitting a billow of clouds; it skirts around them. Otherwise, it will encounter turbulence if it goes through the clouds. There were even instances of plane-crash on landing because of thick cover of clouds. Now, Sirach, the author of our first reading says it is only the prayer of a humble person that is assured, so to speak, of a successful take-off, smooth cruising, and happy landing.

Which prayer then, is a humble prayer? Who is the humble person whose prayer is always assured of good results? The third reading (gospel of Luke) tells us who. Here, Jesus presents a tax collector namely a sinner as the humble person whose prayer God has granted. Actually, we do not know the list of things he was asking from God, just as, in contrast, we know the list of accomplishments the Pharisee was boasting about, in his so-called prayer before God. Without daring to lift up his face, all the tax-collector could say was for God to have pity on him. He beat his breast perhaps, to still his heart, which was breaking in shame and remorse.

How different is the attitude, the posture, and the language of this man compared to those of the proud Pharisee. Consequently, how different and contrasting were the results of their respective prayers. The lesson we should draw from this is that before starting to pray and while we pray we must acknowledge our sinfulness

and unworthiness. Any other attitude is a sure formula for our prayers not to be heard.

But there are people who do not pray either because they feel self-sufficient or are plain lazy and disinterested in prayer. One wonders if such people still have a grain of faith in them. You pray to God because you believe he can and will help you. When one does not pray at all, can we say he still believes in God? In the second reading, we have the example of a man for whom praying was like his breathing. In fact, prayer was his life; and his life or especially his death, was a prayer offered to God. He says, "The time for me has come to leave this world. I have done my best in the race. I have run the full distance, and I have kept the faith. And now, there is waiting for me the prize of victory." Who was that man of humble prayer? It was Paul.