

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

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MISERICORDIA DEI

John Paul II

THE **CHURCH AND INTERNET**

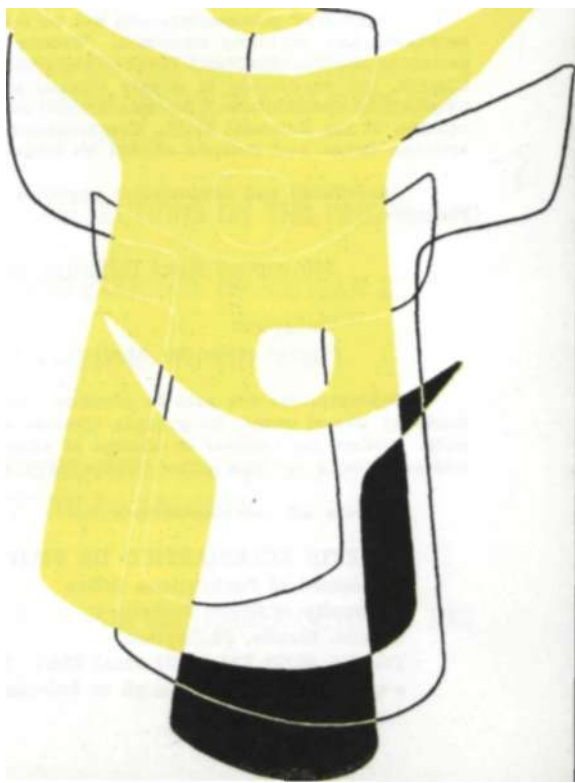
*Pontifical Council for
Social Communications*

THE **ECCLESIOLOGY OF VATICAN II**

Joseph Ratzinger, DD

SOME REFLECTIONS
ON THE PRIESTHOOD

Pedro Dean, DD



BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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New Person for the New World

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

Upon the entry of the third millennium, people from diverse sectors have expressed their dreams for the new epoch: young people have dreams; parents have their plans for their children; leaders entertain vision for their government; politicians dream so much about their career and party; ecclesiastics and religious project visionary ideals and plans for their communities.

The sector of educators is no different. Educators too have their way of foreseeing what the learner should achieve in the classroom and even outside the classrooms where learning is as well possible. In a global way, Catholic educators from many countries and from every level of education also envision every learner to become and to be: *new person for the new world*. This they did during the meeting on World Congress of Catholic Education, where delegates from Asia and Pacific, Africa, North, South and Central America, and Europe who agreed to identify what kind of person institutions of learning should produce for the new world. This contemporary world is characterized by divisions of people, of countries, of tribes, and of families. Note the presence of what at least 40 warring countries. Note the division between

West and Middle East, in families and even among members of Churches. All these are seen against the background of advancing science and technology, tolerance of each other's culture and advancing means of transportation and communication

The latter includes the new definition of classic terminologies and the formation of new categories fed to the minds of the young people, which is two-thirds of the world population. Therefore, nobody is clear who that person is. Each educator and all groups and institutions should exert effort to identify the qualities that contemporary person must possess.

The Christian world has been offering something, that is, the revealed description of what man or woman is - *as image of God*. How this image of God slowly moves and is transformed with the help of the formation received at home as supplemented by formal education in any enterprise of education will always remain a task for educators.

The World Congress on Catholic Education held in Brazil this year has explicitated what Catholic educators should aim at continuously while it faces the new world thus:

- *to strive against illiteracy, which is increasing despite the 20th century's tremendous efforts to provide children with a school education.*
- *to strive against inequality of opportunity, as illustrated by the widening gap between those who have access to knowledge and those who are deprived of it, despite the abundance of information and education potentially available.*
- *to strive for the effective recognition of the dignity of all children, for although they are created in the image of God, their dignity is all too often violated everywhere despite the admirable Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991).*

- *to strive in making new planetary civilization interdependent and respectful of everyone, a civilization respecting every man's spiritual dimension and also protecting his living conditions on earth in this growing awareness of the responsibility of science and technology for the future of mankind and of life in general.*
 - *to strive in educating a generation of pioneers of this new world, pioneers who remain lucid and courageous despite the despairing and defeatist messages of the prophets of doom who turn many young people into discouraged victims with no part to play in a world that holds nothing for them.*
- (Declaration, Brasilia 2002)

All these however, would remain as pledges but subject to realization dependent on particular venue and environment, nation and region, which have specific context only true to the place.

Finally, the *new person for the new world* will always remain as a vision but it is gradually realized depending upon the effort of each Catholic educational and institutional enterprise.

Day of Prayer for Peace in the World*

JOHN PAUL II

1. We have come to Assisi on a *pilgrimage of peace*. We are here, as representatives of different religions, to examine ourselves before God concerning our commitment to peace, to ask him for this gift, to bear witness to our shared longing for a world of greater justice and solidarity.

We wish to do our part in fending off the dark clouds of terrorism, hatred, armed conflict, which in these last few months have grown particularly ominous on humanity's horizon. For this reason we wish *to listen to one other*: we believe that this itself *is already a sign of peace*. In listening to one another there is already a reply to the disturbing questions that worry us. This already serves *to scatter the shadows of suspicion and misunderstanding*.

The shadows will not be dissipated with weapons; *darkness is dispelled by sending out bright beams of light*. A few days ago

* Address of His Holiness to the Representatives of the World Religions, Assisi, 24 January 2002.

I reminded the Diplomatic Corps accredited to the Holy See that hatred can only be overcome through love.

2. We are meeting in Assisi, where everything speaks of a singular prophet of peace known as *Francis*. He is loved not only by Christians, but by many other believers and by people who, though far-removed from religion, identify with his ideals of justice, reconciliation and peace.

Here, the "poor man of Assisi" invites us first of all to raise a song of *gratitude to God for his gifts*. We praise God for *the beauty of the cosmos and of the earth*, the marvelous "garden" that he entrusted to men and women in order that they might cultivate it and tend it (cf. *Gen 2:15*). It is good that people remember that they find themselves in a "flowerbed" of the immense universe, created for them by God. It is important for people to realize that neither they nor the matters which they so frantically pursue are "everything". Only God is "everything", and in the end everyone will have to give an accounting of themselves to him.

We praise God, the Creator and Lord of the universe, *for the gift of life* and especially human life, which has blossomed on this planet through the mysterious plan of his goodness. Life in all its forms is entrusted in a special way to the care of man.

With daily renewed wonder, we note the *variety of manifestations of human life*, from the complementarity of male and female, to a multiplicity of distinctive gifts belonging to the different cultures and traditions that form a multifaceted and versatile linguistic, cultural and artistic cosmos. *This multiplicity is called to form a cohesive whole*, in the contact and dialogue that will enrich and bring joy to all.

God himself has placed in the human heart an *instinctive tendency to live in peace and harmony*. This desire is more deeply-

rooted and determined than any impulse to violence; it is a desire that we have come together to reaffirm here, in Assisi. We do so in the awareness that we are representing the deepest sentiment of every human being.

History has always known men and women who, precisely because they are believers, have distinguished themselves as *witnesses to peace*. By their example they teach us that it is possible to build between individuals and peoples *bridges that lead us to come together and walk with one another* on the paths of peace. We look to them in order to draw inspiration for our commitment in the service of humanity. They encourage us to hope that, also in this new millennium just begun, there will be no lack of men and women of peace, capable of irradiating in the world the light of love and hope.

3. *Peace!* Humanity is *always* in need of peace, but *now* more than ever, after the tragic events which have undermined its confidence and in the face of persistent flashpoints of cruel conflict which create anxiety throughout the world. In my *Message* for 1 January, I stressed the two "pillars" upon which peace rests: commitment to *justice* and readiness to *forgive*.

Justice, first of all, because there can be no true peace without respect for the dignity of persons and peoples, respect for the rights and duties of each person and respect for an equal distribution of benefits and burdens between individuals and in society as a whole. It can never be forgotten that situations of oppression and exclusion are often at the source of violence and terrorism. But *forgiveness* too, because human justice is subject to frailty and to the pressures of individual and group egoism. Forgiveness alone heals the wounds of the heart and fully restores damaged human relations.

Humility and courage are required if we are to take this path. Our gathering today, in a context of dialogue with God, offers us

a chance to reaffirm that *in God we find pre-eminently the union of justice and mercy*. He is supremely faithful to himself and to man, even when people wander far from him. That is why *religions are at the service of peace*. It is the duty of religions, and of their leaders above all, to foster in the people of our time a renewed sense of the urgency of building peace.

4. This was recognized by those who took part in the Interreligious Gathering in the Vatican in October 1999. They affirmed that religious traditions have the resources needed to overcome fragmentation and to promote mutual friendship and respect among peoples. On that occasion, it was also recognized that tragic conflicts often result from *an unjustified association of religion* with nationalistic, political and economic interests, or concerns of other kinds. Once again, gathered here together, we declare that whoever uses religion to foment violence contradicts religion's deepest and truest inspiration.

It is essential, therefore, that *religious people and communities should in the clearest and most radical way repudiate violence*, all violence, starting with the violence that seeks to clothe itself in religion, appealing even to the most holy name of God in order to offend man. *To offend against man* is, most certainly, *to offend against God*. There is no religious goal which can possibly justify the use of violence by man against man.

5. I turn now in a special way to you, my *Christian Brothers and Sisters*. Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ calls us to be apostles of peace. He made his own *the Golden Rule* well known to ancient wisdom: "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (*Mt* 7:12; cf. *Lk* 6:31) and God's commandment to Moses: "Love your neighbour as yourself (cf. *Lev* 19:18; *Mt* 22:39 and parallels). He brought these laws to fulfillment in the new commandment: "Love one another as I have loved you" (*Jn* 13:34).

In his death on Golgotha, Jesus bore in his flesh the wounds of God's passion for humanity. Bearing witness to the heavenly Father's loving plan, he became "our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the dividing wall of hostility" (Eph 2:14).

With Francis, the saint who breathed the air of these hills and walked the streets of this town, let us fix our gaze on the mystery of the Cross, the tree of salvation sprinkled with the redeeming blood of Christ. The lives of Saint Francis, Saint Clare and countless other Christian saints and martyrs were marked by the mystery of the Cross. Their secret was precisely *this sign of the triumph of love over hatred*, of forgiveness over retaliation, of good over evil. We are called to go forward in their footsteps, so that the world will never cease to long for the peace of Christ.

6. If peace is God's gift and has its source in him, where are we to seek it and how can we build it, if not in a deep and intimate relationship with God? To build the peace of order, justice and freedom requires, therefore, a *priority commitment to prayer*, which is openness, listening, dialogue and finally union with God, the prime wellspring of true peace.

To pray is not to escape from history and the problems which it presents. On the contrary, it is to choose to face reality *not on our own, but with the strength that comes from on high*, the strength of truth and love which have their ultimate source in God. Faced with the treachery of evil, religious people can count on God, who absolutely wills what is good. They can pray to him to have the courage to face even the greatest difficulties with a sense of personal responsibility, never yielding to fatalism or impulsive reactions.

7. Brothers and Sisters gathered here from different parts of the world! Shortly we shall go to *the arranged places* in order to beg from God the gift of peace for all humanity. Let us ask that we be given the gift of recognizing the path of peace, of right

relationship with God and among ourselves. Let us ask God to open people's hearts to the truth about himself and the truth about man. *We have a single goal and a shared intention*, but we will pray *in different ways*, respecting one another's religious traditions. In this too, deep down, there is a message: we wish to show the world that the genuine impulse to prayer does not lead to opposition and still less to disdain of others, but rather to constructive dialogue, a dialogue in which each one, without relativism or syncretism of any kind, becomes more deeply aware of the duty to bear witness and to proclaim.

Now is the time to overcome decisively those temptations to hostility which have not been lacking in the religious history of humanity. In fact, when these temptations appeal to religion, they show a profoundly immature face of religion. True religious feeling leads rather to a perception in one way or another of the mystery of God, the source of goodness, and that is a wellspring of respect and harmony between peoples: indeed religion is the chief antidote to violence and conflict (cf. *Message for the World Day of Peace 2002*, 14).

Today, as on 27 October 1986, Assisi *becomes once more the "heart" of a vast multitude of people calling for peace*. From yesterday until this evening, many people are united with us in places of worship, in homes, in communities, throughout the world, praying for peace. They are old people, children, adults and young people: a people tireless in their belief that prayer has the power to bring peace.

May peace dwell especially in the soul of the rising generations. *Young people of the Third Millennium*, young Christians, young people of every religion, I ask you to be, like Francis of Assisi, gentle and courageous "guardians" of true peace, based on justice and forgiveness, truth and mercy!

Go forward into the future holding high *the lamp of peace*. The world has need of its light!

Misericordia Dei

JOHN PAUL II

APOSTOLIC LETTER IN THE FORM OF *MOTU PROPRIO*

On Certain Aspects of The Celebration of The Sacrament of Penance

By the mercy of God, the Father who reconciles us to himself, the Word took flesh in the spotless womb of the Blessed Virgin Mary to save "his people from their sins" (*Mt* 1:21) and to open for them "the way of eternal salvation".¹ By identifying Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (*Jn* 1:29), Saint John the Baptist confirms this mission. In all his deeds and preaching, the Precursor issues a fervent and energetic summons to repentance and conversion, the sign of which is the baptism administered in the waters of the Jordan. Jesus himself underwent this penitential rite (cf. *Mt* 3:13-17), not because he had sinned,

Roman Missal, Advent Preface I.

but because "he allows himself to be numbered among sinners; he is already 'the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world' (*Jn* 1:29); already he is anticipating the 'baptism' of his bloody death".²

Salvation is therefore and above all redemption from sin, which hinders friendship with God, a liberation from the state of slavery in which man finds himself ever since he succumbed to the temptation of the Evil One and lost the freedom of the children of God (cf. *Rom* 8:21).

Christ entrusts to the Apostles the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God and preaching the Gospel of conversion (cf. *Mk* 16:15; *Mt* 28:18-20). On the evening of the day of his Resurrection, as the apostolic mission is about to begin, Jesus grants the Apostles, through the power of the Holy Spirit, the authority to reconcile repentant sinners with God and the Church: "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (*Jn* 20:22-23).³

Down through history in the constant practice of the Church, the "ministry of reconciliation" (2 *Cor* 5:18), conferred through the Sacraments of Baptism and Penance, has always been seen as an essential and highly esteemed pastoral duty of the priestly ministry, performed in obedience to the command of Jesus. Through the centuries, the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance has developed in different forms, but it has always kept the same basic structure: it necessarily entails not only the action of the minister - only a Bishop or priest, who judges and absolves, tends and heals in the name of Christ - but also the actions of the penitent: contrition, confession and satisfaction.

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 536.

³ Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XIV, *De Sacramento Paenitentiae*, Can. 3: *DS* 1703.

I wrote in my Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*: "I am asking for renewed pastoral courage in ensuring that the day-to-day teaching of Christian communities persuasively and effectively presents the practice of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. As you will recall, in 1984 I dealt with this subject in the Post-Synodal Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia*, which synthesized the results of a General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops devoted to this question. My invitation then was to make every effort to face the crisis of 'the sense of sin' apparent in today's culture. But I was even more insistent in calling for a rediscovery of Christ as *mysterium pietatis*, the one in whom God shows us his compassionate heart and reconciles us fully with himself. It is this face of Christ that must be rediscovered through the Sacrament of Penance, which for the faithful is 'the ordinary way of obtaining forgiveness and the remission of serious sins committed after Baptism'. When the Synod addressed the problem, the crisis of the Sacrament was there for all to see, especially in some parts of the world. The causes of the crisis have not disappeared in the brief span of time since then. But the Jubilee Year, which has been particularly marked by a return to the Sacrament of Penance, has given us an encouraging message, which should not be ignored: if many people, and among them also many young people, have benefited from approaching this Sacrament, it is probably necessary that Pastors should arm themselves with more confidence, creativity and perseverance in presenting it and leading people to appreciate it."⁴

With these words, I intended, as I do now, to encourage my Brother Bishops and earnestly appeal to them - and, through them, to all priests - to undertake a vigorous revitalization of the Sacrament of Reconciliation. This is a requirement of genuine

⁴ No. 37: AAS 93 (2001) 292.

charity and true pastoral justice,⁵ and we should remember that the faithful, when they have the proper interior dispositions, have the right to receive personally the sacramental gift.

In order that the minister of the Sacrament may know the dispositions of penitents with a view to granting or withholding absolution and imposing a suitable penance, it is necessary that the faithful, as well as being aware of the sins they have committed, of being sorry for them and resolved not to fall into them again,⁶ should also confess their sins. In this sense, the Council of Trent declared that it is necessary "by divine decree to confess each and every mortal sin".⁷ The Church has always seen an essential link between the judgment entrusted to the priest in the Sacrament and the need for penitents to name their own sins,⁸ except where this is not possible. Since, therefore, the integral confession of serious sins is by divine decree a constitutive part of the Sacrament, it is in no way subject to the discretion of pastors (dispensation, interpretation, local customs, etc.). In the relevant disciplinary norms, the competent ecclesiastical authority merely indicates the criteria for distinguishing a real impossibility of confessing one's sins from other situations in which the impossibility is only apparent or can be surmounted.

In the present circumstances of the care of souls and responding to the concerned requests of many Brothers in the Episcopate, I consider it useful to recall some of the canonical laws in force regarding the celebration of this Sacrament and clarify certain aspects of them - in a spirit of communion with the

⁵ Cf. *Code of Canon Law*, Cans. 213 and 843 § 1.

⁶ Cf. Ecumenical Council of Trent, Session XIV, *Doctrina de Sacramento Paenitentiae*, Chap. 4: *DS* 1676.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Can. 7: *DS* 1707.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Chap. 5: *DS* 1679; Ecumenical Council of Florence, *Decree for the Armenians* (22 November 1439): *DS* 1323.

responsibility proper to the entire Episcopate⁹ with a view to a better administration of the Sacrament. It is a question of ensuring an ever more faithful, and thus more fruitful, celebration of the gift entrusted to the Church by the Lord Jesus after his Resurrection (cf. *Jn* 20:19-23). This seems especially necessary, given that in some places there has been a tendency to abandon individual confession and wrongly to resort to "general" or "communal" absolution. In this case general absolution is no longer seen as an extraordinary means to be used in wholly exceptional situations. On the basis of an arbitrary extension of the conditions required for *grave necessity*,¹⁰ in practice there is a lessening of fidelity to the divine configuration of the Sacrament, and specifically regarding the need for individual confession, with consequent serious harm to the spiritual life of the faithful and to the holiness of the Church.

Thus, after consultation with the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, and the Pontifical Council for Legislative Texts, and after hearing the views of venerable Brother Cardinals in charge of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, and reaffirming Catholic doctrine on the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation as summarized in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*," conscious of my pastoral responsibility and fully aware of the need for this Sacrament and of its enduring efficacy, I decree the following:

⁹ Cf. Can. 392; Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, Nos. 23, 27; Decree on the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Christus Dominus*, No. 16.

¹⁰ Cf. Can. 961, § 1, 2.

¹¹ Cf. Nos. 980-987; 1114-1134; 1420-1498.

1. Ordinaries are to remind all the ministers of the Sacrament of Penance that the universal law of the Church, applying Catholic doctrine in this area, has established that:

a) "Individual and integral confession and absolution are the sole ordinary means by which the faithful, conscious of grave sin, are reconciled with God and the Church; only physical or moral impossibility excuses from such confession, in which case reconciliation can be obtained in other ways."¹²

b) Therefore, "all those of whom it is required by virtue of their ministry in the care of souls are obliged to ensure that the confessions of the faithful entrusted to them are heard when they reasonably ask, and that they are given the opportunity to approach individual confession, on days and at times set down for their convenience."¹³

Moreover, all priests with faculties to administer the Sacrament of Penance are always to show themselves wholeheartedly disposed to administer it whenever the faithful make a reasonable request.¹⁴ An unwillingness to welcome the wounded sheep, and even to go out to them in order to bring them back into the fold, would be a sad sign of a lack of pastoral sensibility in those who, by priestly Ordination, must reflect the image of the Good Shepherd.

2. Local Ordinaries, and parish priests and rectors of churches and shrines, should periodically verify that the greatest possible provision is in fact being made for the faithful to confess their

¹² Can. 960.

¹³ Can. 986, § 1.

¹⁴ Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 13; *Ordo Paenitentiae*, editio typica, 1974, *Praenotanda*, No. 10, b.

sins. It is particularly recommended that in places of worship confessors be visibly present at the advertized times, that these times be adapted to the real circumstances of penitents, and that confessions be especially available before Masses, and even during Mass if there are other priests available, in order to meet the needs of the faithful.¹⁵

3. Since "the faithful are obliged to confess, according to kind and number, all grave sins committed after Baptism of which they are conscious after careful examination and which have not yet been directly remitted by the Church's power of the keys, nor acknowledged in individual confession,"¹⁶ any practice which restricts confession to a generic accusation of sin or of only one or two sins judged to be more important is to be reprovved. Indeed, in view of the fact that all the faithful are called to holiness, it is recommended that they confess venial sins also.¹⁷

4. In the light of and within the framework of the above norms, the absolution of a number of penitents at once without previous confession, as envisaged by Can. 961 of the Code of Canon Law, is to be correctly understood and administered. Such absolution is in fact "exceptional in character"¹⁸ and "cannot be imparted in a general manner unless:

1. *the danger of death is imminent* and there is not time for the priest or priests to hear the confessions of the individual penitents;

¹⁵ Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, *Responsa ad dubia proposita: Notitiae*, 37 (2001) 259-260.

¹⁶ Can. 988, § 1.

¹⁷ Cf. Can. 988, § 2: John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December 1984), 32: AAS 77 (1985) 267; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1458.

¹⁸ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Reconciliatio et Paenitentia* (2 December 1984), 32: AAS 77 (1985) 267.

2. a *grave necessity* exists, that is, when in light of the number of penitents a supply of confessors is not readily available to hear the confessions of individuals in an appropriate way within an appropriate time, so that the penitents would be deprived of sacramental grace or Holy Communion for a long time through no fault of their own; it is not considered sufficient necessity if confessors cannot be readily available only because of the great number of penitents, as can occur on the occasion of some great feast or pilgrimage."¹⁹

With reference to the case of *grave necessity*, the following clarification is made:

a) It refers to situations which are objectively exceptional, such as can occur in mission territories or in isolated communities of the faithful, where the priest can visit only once or very few times a year, or when war or weather conditions or similar factors permit.

b) The two conditions set down in the Canon to determine grave necessity are inseparable. Therefore, it is never just a question of whether individuals can have their confession heard "in an appropriate way" and "within an appropriate time" because of the shortage of priests; this must be combined with the fact that penitents would otherwise be forced to remain deprived of sacramental grace "for a long time", through no fault of their own. Therefore, account must be taken of the overall circumstances of the penitents and of the Diocese, in what refers to its pastoral organization and the possibility of the faithful having access to the Sacrament of Penance.

¹⁹ Can. 961, § 1.

c) The first condition, the impossibility of hearing confessions "in an appropriate way" "within an appropriate time", refers only to the time reasonably required for the elements of a valid and worthy celebration of the Sacrament. It is not a question here of a more extended pastoral conversation, which can be left to more favourable circumstances. The reasonable and appropriate time within which confessions can be heard will depend upon the real possibilities of the confessor or confessors, and of the penitents themselves.

d) The second condition calls for a prudential judgment in order to assess how long penitents can be deprived of sacramental grace for there to be a true impossibility as described in Can. 960, presuming that there is no imminent danger of death. Such a judgment is not prudential if it distorts the sense of physical or moral impossibility, as would be the case, for example, if it was thought that a period of less than a month means remaining "for a long time" in such a state of privation.

e) It is not acceptable to contrive or to allow the contrivance of situations of apparent *grave necessity*, resulting from not administering the Sacrament in the ordinary way through a failure to implement the above mentioned norms,²⁰ and still less because of penitents' preference for general absolution, as if this were a normal option equivalent to the two ordinary forms set out in the Ritual.

f) The large number of penitents gathered on the occasion of a great feast or pilgrimage, or for reasons of tourism or

Cf. above Nos. 1 and 2.

because of today's increased mobility of people, does not in itself constitute sufficient necessity.

5. Judgment as to whether there exist the conditions required by Can. 961 §1, 2 is not a matter for the confessor but for "the diocesan Bishop who can determine cases of such necessity in the light of criteria agreed upon with other members of the Episcopal Conference."²¹ These pastoral criteria must embody the pursuit of total fidelity, in the circumstances of their respective territories, to the fundamental criteria found in the universal discipline of the Church, which are themselves based upon the requirements deriving from the Sacrament of Penance itself as a divine institution.

6. Given the fundamental importance of full harmony among the Bishops' Conferences of the world in a matter so essential to the life of the Church, the various Conferences, observing Can. 455 § 2 of the Code of Canon Law, shall send as soon as possible to the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments the text of the norms which they intend to issue or update in the light of this *Motu Proprio* on the application of Can. 961. This will help to foster an ever greater communion among the Bishops of the Church as they encourage the faithful everywhere to draw abundantly from the fountains of divine mercy which flow unceasingly in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

In this perspective of communion it will also be appropriate for Diocesan Bishops to inform their respective Bishops' Conferences whether or not cases of *grave necessity* have occurred in their jurisdictions. It will then be the task of each Conference to inform the above-mentioned Congregation about the real situation in their regions and about any changes subsequently taking place.

Can. 961, § 2.

7. As regards the personal disposition of penitents, it should be reiterated that:

a) "For the faithful to avail themselves validly of sacramental absolution given to many at one time, it is required that they not only be suitably disposed but also at the same time intend to confess individually the serious sins which at present cannot be so confessed."²²

b) As far as possible, including cases of imminent danger of death, there should be a preliminary exhortation to the faithful "that each person take care to make an act of contrition."²³

c) It is clear that penitents living in a habitual state of serious sin and who do not intend to change their situation cannot validly receive absolution.

8. The obligation "to confess serious sins at least once a year"²⁴ remains, and therefore "a person who has had serious sins remitted by general absolution is to approach individual confession as soon as there is an opportunity to do so before receiving another general absolution, unless a just cause intervenes."²⁵

9. Concerning the *place* and *confessional* for the celebration of the Sacrament, it should be remembered that:

a) "the proper place to hear sacramental confessions is a church or an oratory,"²⁶ though it remains clear that pastoral reasons can justify celebrating the Sacrament in other places.²⁷

²² Can. 962, § 1.

²³ Can. 962, § 2.

²⁴ Can. 989.

²⁵ Can. 963.

²⁶ Can. 964, § 1.

²⁷ Cf. Can. 964 § 3.

b) confessionals are regulated by the norms issued by the respective Episcopal Conferences, who shall ensure that confessionals are located "in an open area" and have "a fixed grille", so as to permit the faithful and confessors themselves who may wish to make use of them to do so freely.²⁸

I decree that everything I have set down in this Apostolic Letter issued *Motu Proprio* shall have full and lasting force and be observed from this day forth, notwithstanding any provisions to the contrary. All that I have decreed in this Letter is, by its nature, valid for the venerable Oriental Catholic Churches in conformity with the respective Canons of their own Code.

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 7 April, the Second Sunday of Easter, the Feast of Divine Mercy, in the year of our Lord 2002, the twenty-fourth of my Pontificate.

²⁸ Pontifical Council for the Interpretation of Legislative Texts, *Responsa ad propositionem dubium: de loco excipiendi sacramentales confessiones* (7 July 1998): AAS 90 (1998) 711.

Peace in the World, Dialogue among Christians and with Other Religions

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

Peace, *shalom*, is at the centre of the message of the Old and the New Testament. In the Bible, peace, *shalom*, is not simply a normal courteous greeting; it is the eschatological promise that comes from God and is the hope of blessing for mankind. Jesus Christ himself is our peace (cf. Eph 2,14). Blessed by God in Jesus Christ, Christians must be a blessing for one another and a blessing for all the nations. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God" (Mt 5,9). The Church is called to be the sign, instrument and witness of peace, peace with God and among men (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 11).

Peace, justice and forgiveness

Peace between men, that tranquillity of order taught by St Augustine, to which Pope John Paul II referred in his Message for the World Day of Peace (cf. n. 3) is not merely the *silence of guns and the absence of war*. It is the fruit of the order built into human society by its divine Founder (cf. *Gaudium et spes*, n. 78), and implies a constant effort to establish justice in the world. As Sacred Scripture tells us, true peace is the "work of justice" (Is 32,17; cf. Jas 3,18).

By justice we mean respect for the dignity of every person, his fundamental human rights and freedom. It means not discriminating on the basis of faith, race, cultural background or gender. By justice we mean guaranteeing the right of every human being to life, land, food, water, and to an education that gives them a fuller awareness of these rights and the capacity of self-determination in their lives. Such a personal good presumes the common good, social justice above all for the poor, social balance and stability of the social and political order.

In the face of a world scarred by sin, egoism and envy; in a world which all too often violently denies "justice", and, in the vicious cycle of conflicts overturns the tranquillity of order, the premise and substance of peace, it is not possible to establish peace without the "merciful Providence of God, who knows how to touch even the most hardened of hearts and bring good fruits even from what seems utterly barren soil" (*Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1 January 2002, n. 1). Peace is the gift of forgiveness, of redemption and of the new creation; as are love, joy, self-control, kindness, gentleness, it is a fruit of the Spirit (cf. Gal 5,22). The kingdom of God is justice, peace, and joy in the Spirit (cf. Rom 14,17).

This hope must profoundly inspire our prayer. Peace must be continually implored, so that it may be granted and safeguarded. The *arm of prayer* also strengthens our mission to reverse situations of injustice, and work together to build a more just world. Led by the meekness of the One who preached justice for the poor of the Kingdom, Christians believe that "the ability to forgive lies at the very basis of the idea of a future society marked by justice and solidarity" (*Message*, n. 9).

Christians realize that the ethnic, racial and religious hatred, the spiral of violence that strikes victims and executioners without

distinction, can have an antidote: forgiveness. It is only forgiveness that puts us above the accusations; which permits us not to lay blame on a whole nation on account of a few persons; not to allow to fall on the sons the sins of their fathers. Forgiveness, which depends on each one of us, can re-establish justice and lead us out of a situation of war to one of peace.

Reconciliation and peace between Christians

Precisely reflecting on the bond between peace and forgiveness we can locate the importance of ecumenical dialogue and collaboration between Christians. "Before the world, united action in society on the part of Christians has the clear value of a joint witness to the name of the Lord" (*Ut unum sint*, n. 75). And not only this. Oppressed by their history of disputes and conflicts, accused of having sometimes used force in preaching and of imposing the Gospel of Christ with arms, especially in this century, Christians have begun the demanding and slow process of reciprocal forgiveness. There cannot be ecumenism without conversion and pardon (cf. *ibid.* n. 15). The shame and interior remorse over the scandal of division, the repentance that the Spirit fosters, are the basis of the ecumenical movement (cf. *Unitatis redintegration* n. 1).

Today Christians have crossed the threshold of the third millennium, and find themselves faced with a demanding, difficult and essential choice. The ecumenical task, that is the promotion of unity between Christians is one of the great challenges and urgent tasks at the beginning of the new millennium (cf. *Novo Millennio ineunte*[^] n. 12,48). The faithful are called to "promote a spirituality of communion" (*ibid.*, n. 43), and to be the "light of the world", the "city set on a mountain" (Mt 5,14).

They preach pardon, *this particular form of love* (cf. *Message*, n. 2) and laboriously apply it to themselves, and their Churches

of the East and of the West. Dialogue, encounter, purification of the memory are for the Church an act of courage and a serious necessity. They realize that "the consistency and honesty of intentions and of statements of principles are verified by their application to real life" (*Ut unum sint*, n. 74). In the present reality, this means that by their exemplary behaviour that they will offer to the world a witness of pardon, harmony and dialogue, that must be even deeper when the differences seem insuperable.

Despite the lasting divisions, and thanks to their experience of dialogue, the Churches have so far been able to show that the process of the purification of the memory of their past little by little generates a movement that makes "the 'New Law' of the spirit of charity prevail.... The 'universal brotherhood' of Christians has become a firm ecumenical conviction" (*ibid.*, n. 42). They already live in a communion that is real and profound even if it is not yet perfect (cf. *ibid.*, nn. 11-14). In their witness and service to peace, even now they can and must collaborate closely with one another.

Ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue

The attitude of the Churches and their readiness to forgive that they apply in their reciprocal relations, must encourage them to start a dialogue with the other religions and cultures, so that the ecumenical morality they seek in their action may be reflected in their relationships and dialogues with the other religions, for a collaboration that will effectively reaffirm the values of life and human culture.

The ecumenical dialogue and the interreligious dialogue are connected and overlap, but are not identical with each other. There is a specific, qualitative difference between them and, therefore, they should not be confused. Ecumenical dialogues are not only based on the tolerance and respect due for every human and

religious conviction; nor are they founded solely on liberal philanthropy or mere polite courtesy; on the contrary, ecumenical dialogue is rooted in the common faith in Jesus Christ and the reciprocal recognition of baptism, which means that all the baptized become members of the one Body of Christ (cf. Gal 3,28); I Cor 12,13; *Ut unum sint*, n. 42) and can pray the "*Our Father*" together, as Jesus taught us. In other religions the Church recognizes a ray of that truth "that enlightens every man" (Jn 1,9), but is revealed in its fullness only in Jesus Christ; only he is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14,6; cf. *Nostra aetate*_L n. 2). It is therefore ambiguous to refer to interreligious dialogue in terms of macro-ecumenism or of a new and vaster phase of ecumenism.

Christians and the followers of other religions can pray, but cannot pray together. Every form of syncretism is to be excluded. Likewise, they share the sense of and respect for God or the Divine, and the desire for God or the Divine; respect for life, the desire for peace with God or with the Divine, among human beings and in the cosmos; they share many moral values. They can and must collaborate to safeguard and promote together social justice, moral values, peace and freedom, for the benefit of all mankind. This applies in particular for the monotheistic religions who see Abraham as their father in faith.

The invitation to the *Day of Prayer for Peace in the World* is a way of reaffirming all of this. The Catholic Church considers participation in it a useful opportunity for witnessing together that "Christians feel ever more challenged by the issue of peace" (*Ut unum sint*, n. 76). Applying the criteria of the their own quest for unity, Christians respect the other religions. They know that the "New Law" of the spirit of charity encourages acceptance and does not exclude legitimate diversity. They know that they have in common with the other religions the weapon of prayer to implore peace.

In the face of the terrible evil of the absence of peace, in the face of the never-ending series of painful losses caused by war, they know that have only one alternative: to bear witness to reciprocal pardon and to the tranquillity of order between them. Thus we ask all to set out with us on the same path of hope that leads to justice, reconciliation and peace.

The Church and Internet

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL COMMUNICATIONS

I

INTRODUCTION

1. The Church's interest in the Internet is a particular expression of her longstanding interest in the media of social communication. Seeing the media as an outcome of the historical scientific process by which humankind "advances further and further in the discovery of the resources and values contained in the whole of creation,"¹ the Church often has declared her conviction that they are, in the words of the Second Vatican Council, "marvellous technical inventions"² that already do much to meet human needs and may yet do even more.

¹ John Paul II, encyclical letter *Laborem Exercens*, n. 25; cf. Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 34.

² Vatican Council II, Decree on the Means of Social Communication *Inter Mirifica*, n. 1.

Thus the Church has taken a fundamentally positive approach to the media.³ Even when condemning serious abuses, documents of this Pontifical Council for Social Communications have been at pains to make it clear that "a merely censorious attitude on the part of the Church...is neither sufficient nor appropriate".⁴

Quoting Pope Pius XII's 1957 encyclical letter *Miranda Prorsus*, the Pastoral Instruction on the Means of Social Communication *Communio et Progressio* published in 1971, underlined that point: "The Church sees these media as 'gifts of God' which, in accordance with his providential design, unite men in brotherhood and so help them to cooperate with his plan for their salvation."⁵ This remains our view, and it is the view we take of the Internet.

2. As the Church understands it, the history of human communication is something like a long journey, bringing humanity "from the pride-driven project of Babel and the collapse into confusion and mutual incomprehension to which it gave rise (cf. *Gen* 11:1-9), to Pentecost and the gift of tongues: a restoration of communication, centered on Jesus, through the action of the Holy Spirit."⁶ In the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, "communication among men found its highest ideal and supreme example in God who had become man and brother."⁷

³ For example, *Inter Mirifica*; the Messages of Pope Paul VI and Pope John Paul II on the occasion of the World Communication Days; Pontifical Council for Social Communications, Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio*, *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media: A Pastoral Response*, Pastoral Instruction *Aetatis Novae*, *Ethics in Advertising*, *Ethics in Communications*.

⁴ *Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media*, n. 30.

⁵ *Communio et Progressio*, n. 2.

⁶ John Paul II, Message for the 34th World Communications Day, June 4, 2000.

⁷ *Communio et Progressio*, n. 10.

The modern media of social communication are cuuural factors that play a role in this story. As the Second Vatican Council remarks, "although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of Christ", nevertheless "such progress is of vital concern 10 the kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society."⁸ Considering the media of social communication in this light, we see that they "contribute greatly to the enlargement and enrichment of men's minds and to the propagation and consolidation of the kingdom of God."⁹

Today this applies in a special way to the Internet, which is helping bring about revolutionary changes in commerce, education, politics, journalism, the relationship of nation to nation and culture to culture - changes not just in how people communicate but in how they understand their lives. In a companion document, *Ethics in Internet*, we discuss these matters in their ethical dimension.¹⁰ Here we consider the Internet's implications for religion and especially for the Catholic Church.

3. The Church has a two-fold aim in regard to the media. One aspect is to encourage their right development and right use for the sake of human development, justice, and peace - for the upbuilding of society at the local, national, and community levels in light of the common good and in a spirit of solidarity. Considering the great importance of social communications, the Church seeks "honest and respectful dialogue with those responsible for the communications media" - a dialogue that relates primarily to the shaping of media policy." "On the Church's side

⁸ Vatican Council II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 39.

⁹ *Inter Mirifica*, 2.

¹⁰ Pontifical Council for Social Communications, *Ethics in Internet*.

¹¹ *Aetatis Novae*, 8.

this dialogue involves efforts to understand the media - their purposes, procedures, forms and genres, internal structures and modalities - and to offer support and encouragement to those involved in media work. On the basis of this sympathetic understanding and support, it becomes possible to offer meaningful proposals for removing obstacles to human progress and the proclamation of the Gospel."¹²

But the Church's concern also relates to communication in and by the Church herself. Such communication is more than just an exercise in technique, for it "finds its starting point in the communion of love among the divine Persons and their communication with us", and in the realization that Trinitarian communication "reaches out to humankind: The Son is the Word, eternally 'spoken' by the Father; and in and through Jesus Christ, Son and Word made flesh, God communicates himself and his salvation to women and men."¹³

God continues to communicate with humanity through the Church, the bearer and custodian of his revelation, to whose living teaching office alone he has entrusted the task of authentically interpreting his word.¹⁴ Moreover, the Church herself is a *communio*, a communion of persons and eucharistic communities arising from and mirroring the communion of the Trinity;¹⁵ communication therefore is of the essence of the Church. This, more than any other reason, is why "the Church's practice of communication should be exemplary, reflecting the highest standards of truthfulness, accountability, sensitivity to human rights, and other relevant principles and norms."¹⁶

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ethics in Communications*, n. 3.

¹⁴ Cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei Verbum*, n. 10.

¹⁵ *Aetatis Novae*, n. 10.

¹⁶ *Ethics in Communications*, n. 26.

4. Three decades ago *Communio et Progressio* pointed out that "modern media offer new ways of confronting people with the message of the Gospel."¹⁷ Pope Paul VI said the Church "would feel guilty before the Lord" if it failed to use the media for evangelization.¹⁸ Pope John Paul II has called the media "the first Areopagus of the modern age", and declared that "it is not enough to use the media simply to spread the Christian message and the Church's authentic teaching. It is also necessary to integrate that message into the 'new culture' created by modern communications."¹⁹ Doing that is all the more important today, since not only do the media now strongly influence what people think about life but also to a great extent "human experience itself is an experience of media."²⁰

All this applies to the Internet. And even though the world of social communications "may at times seem at odds with the Christian message, it also offers unique opportunities for proclaiming the saving truth of Christ to the whole human family. Consider... the positive capacities of the Internet to carry religious information and teaching beyond all barriers and frontiers. Such a wide audience would have been beyond the wildest imaginings of those who preached the Gospel before us... Catholics should not be afraid to throw open the doors of social communications to Christ, so that his Good News may be heard from the housetops of the world."²¹

¹⁷ *Communio et Progressio*, 128.

¹⁸ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n. 45.

" Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, n. 37.

²⁰ *Aetatis Novae*, n. 2.

²¹ John Paul II, Message for the 35th World Communications Day, n. 3, May 27, 2001.

II

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

5. "Communication in and by the Church is essentially communication of the Good News of Jesus Christ. It is the proclamation of the Gospel as a prophetic, liberating word to the men and women of our times; it is testimony, in the face of radical secularization, to divine truth and to the transcendent destiny of the human person; it is witness given in solidarity with all believers against conflict and division, to justice and communion among peoples, nations, and cultures."²²

Since announcing the Good News to people formed by a media culture requires taking carefully into account the special characteristics of the media themselves, the Church now needs to understand the Internet. This is necessary in order to communicate effectively with people - especially young people - who are steeped in the experience of this new technology, and also in order to use it well.

The media offer important benefits and advantages from a religious perspective: "They carry news and information about religious events, ideas, and personalities; they serve as vehicles for evangelization and catechesis. Day in and day out, they provide inspiration, encouragement, and opportunities for worship to persons confined to their homes or to institutions."²³ But over and above these, there also are benefits more or less peculiar to the Internet. It offers people direct and immediate access to important religious and spiritual resources - great libraries and museums and places of worship, the teaching documents of the Magisterium, the writings of the Fathers and Doctors of the Church and the religious

Aetatis Novae, n. 9.

Ethics in Communications, n. 11.

wisdom of the ages. It has a remarkable capacity to overcome distance and isolation, bringing people into contact with like-minded persons of good will who join in virtual communities of faith to encourage and support one another. The Church can perform an important service to Catholics and non-Catholics alike by the selection and transmission of useful data in this medium.

The Internet is relevant to many activities and programs of the Church - evangelization, including both re-evangelization and new evangelization and the traditional missionary work *ad gentes*, catechesis and other kinds of education, news and information, apologetics, governance and administration, and some forms of pastoral counseling and spiritual direction. Although the virtual reality of cyberspace cannot substitute for real interpersonal community, the incarnational reality of the sacraments and the liturgy, or the immediate and direct proclamation of the gospel, it can complement them, attract people to a fuller experience of the life of faith, and enrich the religious lives of users. It also provides the Church with a means for communicating with particular groups - young people and young adults, the elderly and home-bound, persons living in remote areas, the members of other religious bodies - who otherwise may be difficult to reach.

A growing number of parishes, dioceses, religious congregations, and church-related institutions, programs, and organizations of all kinds now make effective use of the Internet for these and other purposes. Creative projects under Church sponsorship exist in some places on the national and regional levels. The Holy See has been active in this area for several years and is continuing to expand and develop its Internet presence. Church-related groups that have not yet taken steps to enter cyberspace are encouraged to look into the possibility of doing so at an early date. We strongly recommend the exchange of ideas and information about the Internet among those with experience in the field and those who are newcomers.

6. The Church also needs to understand and use the Internet as a tool of internal communications. This requires keeping clearly in view its special character as a direct, immediate, interactive, and participatory medium.

Already, the two-way interactivity of the Internet is blurring the old distinction between those who communicate and those who receive what is communicated,²⁴ and creating a situation in which, potentially at least, everyone can do both. This is not the one-way, top-down communication of the past. As more and more people become familiar with this characteristic of the Internet in other areas of their lives, they can be expected also to look for it in regard to religion and the Church.

The technology is new, but the idea is not. Vatican Council II said members of the Church should disclose to their pastors "their needs and desires with that liberty and confidence which befits children of God and brothers of Christ"; in fact, according to knowledge, competence, or position, the faithful are not only able but sometimes obliged "to manifest their opinion on those things which pertain to the good of the Church."²⁵ *Communio et Progressio* remarked that as a "living body" the Church "needs public opinion in order to sustain a giving and taking among her members."²⁶ Although truths of faith "do not leave room for arbitrary interpretations", the pastoral instruction noted "an enormous area where members of the Church can express their views."²⁷

Similar ideas are expressed in the Code of Canon Law²⁸ as well as in more recent documents of the Pontifical Council for

²⁴ Cf. *Communio et Progressio*, n. 15.

²⁵ Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, n. 37.

²⁶ *Communio et Progressio*, n. 116.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, n. 117.

²⁸ Cf. Canon 212.2, 212.3.

Social Communications.²⁹ *Aetatis Novae* calls two-way communication and public opinion "one of the ways of realizing in a concrete manner the Church's character as *communio*."³⁰ *Ethics in Communications* says: "A two-way flow of information and views between pastors and faithful, freedom of expression sensitive to the well being of the community and to the role of the Magisterium in fostering it, and responsible public opinion all are important expressions of 'the fundamental right of dialogue and information within the Church'."³¹ The Internet provides an effective technological means of realizing this vision.

Here, then, is an instrument that can be put creatively to use for various aspects of administration and governance. Along with opening up channels for the expression of public opinion, we have in mind such things as consulting experts, preparing meetings, and practicing collaboration in and among particular churches and religious institutes on local, national, and international levels.

7. Education and training are another area of opportunity and need. "Today everybody needs some form of continuing media education, whether by personal study or participation in an organized program or both. More than just teaching about techniques, media education helps people form standards of good taste and truthful moral judgment, an aspect of conscience formation. Through her schools and formation programs the Church should provide media education of this kind."³²

Education and training regarding the Internet ought to be part of comprehensive programs of media education available to members of the Church. As much as possible, pastoral planning

²⁹ Cf. *Aetatis Novae*, n. 10; *Ethics in Communications*, n. 26.

³⁰ *Aetatis Novae*, n. 10.

³¹ *Ethics in Communications*, n. 26.

³² *Ethics in Communications*, n. 25.

for social communications should make provision for this training in the formation of seminarians, priests, religious, and lay pastoral personnel as well as teachers, parents, and students.³³

Young people in particular need to be taught "not only to be good Christians when they are recipients but also to be active in using all the aids to communication that lie within the media... So, young people will be true citizens of that age of social communications which has already begun"³⁴ - an age in which media are seen to be "part of a still unfolding culture whose full implications are as yet imperfectly understood."³⁵ Teaching about the Internet and the new technology thus involves much more than teaching techniques; young people need to learn how to function well in the world of cyberspace, make discerning judgments according to sound moral criteria about what they find there, and use the new technology for their integral development and the benefit of others.

8. The Internet also presents some special problems for the Church, over and above those of a general nature discussed in *Ethics in Internet*, the document accompanying this one.³⁶ While emphasizing what is positive about the Internet, it is important to be clear about what is not.

At a very deep level, "the world of the media can sometimes seem indifferent and even hostile to Christian faith and morality. This is partly because media culture is so deeply imbued with a typically postmodern sense that the only absolute truth is that there are no absolute truths or that, if there were, they would be inaccessible to human reason and therefore irrelevant."³⁷

Aetatis Novae, n. 28.

Communio et Progressio, n. 107.

John Paul II, Message for the 24th World Communications Day, 1990.

Cf. *Ethics in Internet*.

John Paul II, Message for the 35th World Communications Day, n. 3.

Among the specific problems presented by the Internet is the presence of hate sites devoted to defaming and attacking religious and ethnic groups. Some of these target the Catholic Church. Like pornography and violence in the media, Internet hate sites are "reflections of the dark side of a human nature marred by sin."³⁸ And while respect for free expression may require tolerating even voices of hatred up to a point, industry self-regulation - and, where required, intervention by public authority - should establish and enforce reasonable limits to what can be said.

The proliferation of web sites calling themselves Catholic creates a problem of a different sort. As we have said, church-related groups should be creatively present on the Internet; and well-motivated, well-informed individuals and unofficial groups acting on their own initiative are entitled to be there as well. But it is confusing, to say the least, not to distinguish eccentric doctrinal interpretations, idiosyncratic devotional practices, and ideological advocacy bearing a 'Catholic' label from the authentic positions of the Church. We suggest an approach to this issue below.

9. Certain other matters still require much reflection. Regarding these, we urge continued research and study, including "the development of an anthropology and a theology of communication"³⁹ - now, with specific reference to the Internet. Along with study and research, of course, positive pastoral planning for the use of the Internet can and should go forward.⁴⁰

One area for research concerns the suggestion that the wide range of choices regarding consumer products and services available on the Internet may have a spillover effect in regard to religion

Pornography and Violence in the Communications Media, n. 7.

Aetatis Novae, 8.

Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 39.

and encourage a 'consumer' approach to matters of faith. Data suggest that some visitors to religious web sites may be on a sort of shopping spree, picking and choosing elements of customized religious packages to suit their personal tastes. The "tendency on the part of some Catholics to be selective in their adherence" to the Church's teaching is a recognized problem in other contexts;⁴¹ more information is needed about whether and to what extent the problem is exacerbated by the Internet.

Similarly, as noted above, the virtual reality of cyberspace has some worrisome implications for religion as well as for other areas of life. Virtual reality is no substitute for the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the sacramental reality of the other sacraments, and shared worship in a flesh-and-blood human community. There are no sacraments on the Internet; and even the religious experiences possible there by the grace of God are insufficient apart from real-world interaction with other persons of faith. Here is another aspect of the Internet that calls for study and reflection. At the same time, pastoral planning should consider how to lead people from cyberspace to true community and how, through teaching and catechesis, the Internet might subsequently be used to sustain and enrich them in their Christian commitment.

III

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

10. Religious people, as concerned members of the larger Internet audience who also have legitimate particular interests of their own, wish to be part of the process that guides the future development of this new medium. It goes without saying that this

⁴¹ Cf. John Paul II, Address to the Bishops of the United States, n. 5, Los Angeles, September 16, 1987.

will sometimes require them to adjust their own thinking and practice.

It is important, too, that people at all levels of the Church use the Internet creatively to meet their responsibilities and help fulfill the Church's mission. Hanging back timidly from fear of technology or for some other reason is not acceptable, in view of the very many positive possibilities of the Internet. "Methods of facilitating communication and dialogue among her own members can strengthen the bonds of unity between them. Immediate access to information makes it possible for [the Church] to deepen her dialogue with the contemporary world... The Church can more readily inform the world of her beliefs and explain the reasons for her stance on any given issue or event. She can hear more clearly the voice of public opinion, and enter into a continuous discussion with the world around her, thus involving herself more immediately in the common search for solutions to humanity's many pressing problems."⁴²

11. In concluding these reflections, therefore, we offer words of encouragement to several groups in particular - Church leaders, pastoral personnel, educators, parents, and especially young people.

To Church leaders: People in leadership positions in all sectors of the Church need to understand the media, apply this understanding in formulating pastoral plans for social communications⁴³ together with concrete policies and programs in this area, and make appropriate use of media. Where necessary, they should receive media education themselves; in fact, "the Church would be well served if more of those who hold offices and perform functions in her name received communication training."⁴⁴

⁴² John Paul II, Message for the 24th World Communications Day, 1990

⁴³ Cf. *Aetatis Novae*, nn. 23-33.

⁴⁴ *Ethics in Communications*, n. 26.

This applies to the Internet as well as to the older media. Church leaders are obliged to use "the full potential of the 'computer age' to serve the human and transcendent vocation of every person, and thus to give glory to the Father from whom all good things come."⁴⁵ They ought to employ this remarkable technology in many different aspects of the Church's mission, while also exploring opportunities for ecumenical and interreligious cooperation in its use.

A special aspect of the Internet, as we have seen, concerns the sometimes confusing proliferation of unofficial web sites labeled 'Catholic'. A system of voluntary certification at the local and national levels under the supervision of representatives of the Magisterium might be helpful in regard to material of a specifically doctrinal or catechetical nature. The idea is not to impose censorship but to offer Internet users a reliable guide to what expresses the authentic position of the Church.

To pastoral personnel. Priests, deacons, religious, and lay pastoral workers should have media education to increase their understanding of the impact of social communications on individuals and society and help them acquire a manner of communicating that speaks to the sensibilities and interests of people in a media culture. Today this clearly includes training regarding the Internet, including how to use it in their work. They can also profit from websites offering theological updating and pastoral suggestions.

As for Church personnel directly involved in media, it hardly needs saying that they must have professional training. But they also need doctrinal and spiritual formation, since "in order to witness to Christ it is necessary to encounter him oneself and foster a personal relationship with him through prayer, the Eucharist and

Message for the 24th World Communications Day.

sacramental reconciliation, reading and reflection on God's word, the study of Christian doctrine, and service to others."⁴⁶

To educators and catechists. The Pastoral Instruction *Communio et Progressio* spoke of the "urgent duty" of Catholic schools to train communicators and recipients of social communications in relevant Christian principles.⁴⁷ The same message has been repeated many times. In the age of the Internet, with its enormous outreach and impact, the need is more urgent than ever.

Catholic universities, colleges, schools, and educational programs at all levels should provide courses for various groups - "seminarians, priests, religious brothers and sisters, and lay leaders... teachers, parents, and students"⁴⁸ - as well as more advanced training in communications technology, management, ethics, and policy issues for individuals preparing for professional media work or decision-making roles, including those who work in social communications for the Church. Furthermore, we commend the issues and questions mentioned above to the attention of scholars and researchers in relevant disciplines in Catholic institutions of higher learning.

To parents. For the sake of their children, as well as for their own sakes, parents must "learn and practice the skills of discerning viewers and listeners and readers, acting as models of prudent use of media in the home."⁴⁹ As far as the Internet is concerned, children and young people often are more familiar with it than their parents are, but parents still are seriously obliged to guide and supervise their children in its use.⁵⁰ If this means learning more

⁴⁶ Message for the 34th World Communications Day, 2000.

⁴⁷ *Communio et Progressio*, n. 107.

⁴⁸ *Aetatis Novae*, n. 28.

⁴⁹ *Ethics in Communications*, n. 25.

⁵⁰ Cf. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, n. 76.

about the Internet than they have up to now, that will be all to good.

Parental supervision should include making sure that filtering technology is used in computers available to children when that is financially and technically feasible, in order to protect them as much as possible from pornography, sexual predators, and other threats. Unsupervised exposure to the Internet should not be allowed. Parents and children should dialogue together about what is seen and experienced in cyberspace; sharing with other families who have the same values and concerns will also be helpful. The fundamental parental duty here is to help children become discriminating, responsible Internet users and not addicts of the Internet, neglecting contact with their peers and with nature itself.

To children and young people. The Internet is a door opening on a glamorous and exciting world with a powerful formative influence; but not everything on the other side of the door is safe and wholesome and true. "Children and young people should be open to formation regarding media, resisting the easy path of uncritical passivity, peer pressure, and commercial exploitation."¹ The young owe it to themselves - and to their parents and families and friends, their pastors and teachers, and ultimately to God - to use the Internet well.

The Internet places in the grasp of young people at an unusually early age an immense capacity for doing good and doing harm, to themselves and others. It can enrich their lives beyond the dreams of earlier generations and empower them to enrich others' lives in turn. It also can plunge them into consumerism, pornographic and violent fantasy, and pathological isolation.

¹ *Ethics in Communications*, n. 25.

Young people, as has often been said, are the future of society and the Church. Good use of the Internet can help prepare them for their responsibilities in both. But this will not happen automatically. The Internet is not merely a medium of entertainment and consumer gratification. It is a tool for accomplishing useful work, and the young must learn to see it and use it as such. In cyberspace, at least as much as anywhere else, they may be called on to go against the tide, practice counter-culturalism, even suffer persecution for the sake of what is true and good.

12. *To all persons of good will.* Finally, then, we would suggest some virtues that need to be cultivated by everyone who wants to make good use of the Internet; their exercise should be based upon and guided by a realistic appraisal of its contents.

Prudence is necessary in order clearly to see the implications - the potential for good and evil - in this new medium and to respond creatively to its challenges and opportunities.

Justice is needed, especially justice in working to close the digital divide - the gap between the information-rich and the information-poor in today's world.⁵² This requires a commitment to the international common good, no less than the "globalization of solidarity."⁵³

Fortitude, courage, is necessary. This means standing up for truth in the face of religious and moral relativism, for altruism and generosity in the face of individualistic consumerism, for decency in the face of sensuality and sin.

⁵² Cf. *Ethics in Internet*, nn. 10, 17.

⁵³ John Paul II, Address to the UN Secretary General and to the Administrative Committee on Coordination of the United Nations, n. 2, April 7, 2000.

And temperance is needed - a self-disciplined approach to this remarkable technological instrument, the Internet, so as to use it wisely and only for good.

Reflecting on the Internet, as upon all the other media of social communications, we recall that Christ is "the perfect communicator"⁵⁴ - the norm and model of the Church's approach to communication, as well as the content that the Church is obliged to communicate. "May Catholics involved in the world of social communications preach the truth of Jesus ever more boldly from the housetops, so that all men and women may hear about the love which is the heart of God's self-communication in Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Communio et Progressio*, n. 11.

⁵⁵ Message for the 35th World Communications Day, n. 4.

Address on the Conferment of the Degree of Doctor in Theology *Honoris Causa**

ALFONSO CARD. LÓPEZ TRUJILLO

Your Eminence, Cardinal Jaime Sin; Your Excellency the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Antonio Franco; Your Excellencies the Bishops; Your Excellencies the Civil Authorities; the Magnificent Rector of the University, Father Tamerlane Lana; the Dean, Father Fausto Gomez; Illustrious Members of the Academic Senate; Professors and dear students; all members of this beloved Pontifical University; distinguished guests; ladies and gentlemen:

This solemn academic ceremony to confer the degree of Doctor in Theology *honoris causa*, which the illustrious Academic Senate has kindly bestowed on me, is a most gratifying occasion for me to address these few words to you. For this, I would like to express my thanks to this entire great university community represented by its High Chancellor, Father Carlos Alfonso Azpiroz Costa, who is fittingly represented here today by the academic authorities.

* Academic Ceremony to Confer the Degree of Doctor in Theology *Honoris Causa* to His Eminence Alfonso Cardinal Trujillo (President of the Pontifical Council for the Family), University of Santo Tomas, Manila, March 20, 2002.

Ever since it was first established on April 28, 1611 by the first Archbishop of Manila, the Dominican Miguel de Benavides, together with Fathers Domingo de Nieva and Bernardo de Santa Catalina, your University, the oldest in Asia, has been outstanding as an intimate and vital intellectual nucleus of Evangelization not only of the Philippines, but of the whole Asian continent. As you are well aware, its history is linked to the Province of Nuestra Senora del Rosario of the Order of Preachers, and from Manila, from the seventeenth century onward, its educational influence extended throughout the Philippines and beyond to China, Tungking (Vietnam), Taiwan and Japan. From very early times, the evangelizing experience of the Dominicans was closely connected with the Evangelization of America. In those days, the humble missionaries would travel by sea from Spain to the Atlantic coast of Mexico; they would cross the continent by land, heading for the Pacific coast and embark from there on a voyage to the Philippines that lasted more than a year during which many of them died.

An eloquent sign of the importance given to this community and to the illustrious fruits of science and wisdom it has produced can be seen in the titles with which Popes and Kings have exalted it: at the request of the King of Spain, Philip IV, Pope Innocence X gave it the title of *University* in 1645; King Charles II, the title of *Royal* in 1785; Pope Leo XII, the title of *Pontifical* in 1902; and in 1954 Pope Pius XII gave it the title of *Catholic* with which it has shone in history.

The fruitfulness of the work of St. Thomas Aquinas, the celestial Patron of this Pontifical University, is a lasting heritage that can enrich the vast areas of science today. The solidity of his philosophy and the delicate, impressive spiritual edifice of his theology have been extolled time and again by the Magisterium of the Church. In his Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*, John Paul II stated this about St. Thomas: "Profoundly convinced that 'whatever its

source, truth is of the Holy Spirit' (*omne verum a quocumque dicatur a Spiritu Sancto est*).¹ Saint Thomas was impartial in his love of truth. He sought truth wherever it might be found and gave consummate demonstration of its universality. In him, the Church's Magisterium has seen and recognized the passion for truth; and, precisely because it stays consistently within the horizon of universal, objective and transcendent truth, his thought scales "heights unthinkable to human intelligence."² Rightly, then, he may be called an "apostolate of the truth."³ Looking unreservedly to truth, the realism of Thomas could recognize the objectivity of truth and produce not merely a philosophy of "what seems to be" but a philosophy of "what is."

This unique aspect of St. Thomas' theology and philosophy, the impulse he gave to the search for truth in a harmony of faith and reason, is particularly timely in today's world. I myself have been able to observe the validity of this fundamental postulate on many occasions throughout my lifetime. During my years of formation in the Pontifical University of St. Thomas in Rome, this was one of the aspects that drew my attention most in the dialogue of faith and reason in the contemporary world. Both in my responsibilities as a Pastor, first in Bogota as Auxiliary Bishop and then as Archbishop of Medellin, and as Secretary and later President of CELAM, I have always found useful inspiration and certain guide in St. Thomas, this great master of Christian thought, the *Doctor communis*.

¹ *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, 109, 1 ad 1, which echoes the well known phrase of the *Ambrosiaster*, In *Prima Cor* \2:3:PL 17, 258.

² Leo XIII, Encyclical Letter *JEterni Patris* (4 August 1879): AAS 11 (1878-79), 109.

³ Paul IV, Apostolic Letter *Lumen Ecclesiae* (20 November 1974), 8: AAS 66 (1974), 683.

As you know, in 1990 Pope John Paul II (from whose venerable hands I received the Cardinal's hat in 1983) appointed me as President of the Pontifical Council for the Family. At the express wish of the Roman Pontiff, this institution has the task to deal with the specific problems of the family, from the point of view of pastoral care and the apostolic activity concerning this vital sector of human life."

The Pontifical Council over which I preside is responsible for the pastoral care of the family and the specific apostolate in this area in application of the teachings and guidelines of the ecclesiastical Magisterium so that Christian families can carry out the mission to which they are called.⁵ In particular, the Pontifical Council for the Family is concerned with: keeping up an exchange of information and experiences with the Bishops, the Bishops' Conferences and organizations to guide the pastoral care of the family; the dissemination of the Church's doctrine on marriage and the family, both on the catechetical and the scientific levels; the promotion and coordination of initiatives in the area of responsible procreation; the fostering of studies on family spirituality; the animation, support and coordination of the defense of human life from the moment of conception; the promotion of theological and human studies on the family "so that the doctrine of the Church may be better understood by men of good will";⁶ maintaining relations with all those who seek the good of the family who are "inspired by different religious confessions (or by different intellectual persuasions) which respect the natural law and a healthy humanism";⁷ collaboration with the Pontifical Council for the Laity, the direction of Catholic family Movements, both national and international, and so on.

⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

In this difficult and delicate task, still today Saint Thomas' accurate and enlightened reasons deserve deep reflection in the national and international forums, in the Parliaments and settings of those who have political responsibilities in governments, in the places where the future of the family and life is discussed, which is the future of humanity.

In the near future, I will be Head of the Holy See Delegation to the Special Session for Children organized by the United Nations. In the area of the defense and promotion of the rights of children, in the face of many venomous ideologies, the importance of a cross-fertilization between faith and reason can be seen in reasserting the values of the family and life, the moral patrimony of humanity.

I often cite the beautiful and significant description of the family as a *spiritual womb* which was coined by St. Thomas and expresses the broad range and depth of his reflections on the essence and the duties of the family: "For a child is by nature part of its father: thus, at first, it is not distinct from its parents as to its body, so long as it is enfolded within its mother's womb; and later on after birth, and before it has the use of its free will, it is enfolded in the care of its parents, which is like a spiritual womb, for so long as man has not the use of reason" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 10, art. 12, c).

The restoration of a concept of the family tied to a correct and sound anthropology that is far removed from the aberrations and ambiguities of erroneous concepts about the human person - "the only creature on earth whom God wanted for himself" (Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 27), is a real challenge for the modern world. "Man, by nature, is a social animal because he needs many things for his life which cannot be obtained alone. It follows that man, by nature, is part of a collectivity in which its members help one another to live well." Among the first things

necessary for life which cannot be dispensed with "is his family of which he is a part. Therefore, every man is begotten by his parents and receives nutriment and up-bringing from them; each member of the family is helped and in turn helps the others" (St. Thomas Aquinas, Comment on *Nichomachean Ethics*, L. 1, lc, 4, n. 4).

The family based on marriage is indeed a moral reality, an authentic moral value to be rediscovered by today's culture and protected and promoted by politicians and lawmakers: "The union of a man and a woman is not only ordained by (natural) law with regard to the generation of offspring, as with the animals, but also with regard to what is appropriate for good morals towards which right reason inclines him, both in himself as a human being, and as a member of a family and a civil society" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Contra gentiles*, L. 3, cp. 12, n. 6). In this sense, the deplorable harassment to which marriage and the family are being subjected in many places in Europe and America implies not only deterioration of the common good in the present, but also serious damage to future generations.

And what can be said about the grave attempts against human dignity which a *culture of death* - as Pope John Paul II calls it in the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* - is inflicting on human life through the horrible crime and scourge on humanity of abortion? In many places, we are sadly witnessing an unacceptable surrender in the defense of the fundamental right to human life, and this is all the more deplorable if we consider politicians' and lawmakers' grave responsibility with regard to the inexorable duty to honor the right to life in the legal systems. In this regard, John Paul II states: "This is the clear teaching of Saint Thomas Aquinas, who writes that 'human law is law inasmuch as it is in conformity with right reason and thus derives from the eternal law. But when a law is contrary to reason, it is called an unjust law; but in this

case it ceases to be a law and becomes instead an act of violence' ? And again: 'Every law made by man can be called a law insofar as it derives from the natural law. But if it is somehow opposed to the natural law, then it is not really a law but rather a corruption of the law'.¹⁰ Now the first and most immediate application of this teaching concerns a human law which disregards the fundamental right and source of all other rights which is the right to life, a right belonging to every individual. Consequently, laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion or euthanasia are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law" (*Evangelium Vitae*, 72).

We are more and more convinced that the heart of the confusion today lies in the failure to recognize the truth. In his Letter to the Romans, Saint Paul says that the truth is incarcerated, not free, suffocated by injustice: "The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against the irreligious and perverse spirit of men who, in this perversity of theirs, hinder the truth" [The verb in Greek is KATECHONTON] (*Romans* 1:18) And, in another place he comments: "Because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie" (*Romans* 1:25).

The truth about God is the source of the truth about man. The major problem today is a genuine anthropology: Is the human creature created as an image of God from the very beginning, from the moment of conception, or is he just a thing? The human being as an image of God possesses the dignity of a *person*, who is not just something, but someone! (Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 357).

⁹ *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 93, a. 3, ad 2um

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I-II, q. 95, a. 2. Aquinas quotes Saint Augustine: "Non videtur esse lex, quae iusta non fueri."

We find a very beautiful expression in the theology of St. Thomas: *Aperta manu clave amoris creaturae prodierunt*. "Creatures came into existence when the key of love opened his hand" (St. Thomas Aquinas, *Sent.* II, prol.). And in another place: *Amor Dei est infundens bonitatem in rebus*.

Many today do not accept the fact that a human being is a gift of God and that *gloria Dei est vivens homo; vita autem hominis est visio Dei* (St. Irenaeus, *Adv. Haeres.*, 4, 20, 7), i.e. that "The glory of God is man fully alive; moreover man's life is the vision of God." And St. Catherine of Siena stated: "What made you establish man is so great a dignity? Certainly the incalculable love by which you have looked on your creature in yourself {*Dialogue* IV, 13).

The enlightened teaching of St. Thomas opens up a way to resolving this question of *humanity* or *inhumanity*. The terrible risk is to forget what the human person is: an image of God and, through the Redeemer, a son.

Secularism and a positivist mentality reject this truth and become incapable of discovering the mystery of man that depends on the mystery of God: "In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22.1).

In many Parliaments and forums around the world, a kind of new ideology is trying to impose a *political truth* that is far from reality, far from the good of the human person and society. This crisis is also leading to a new conception of the family and life which closes the future for the human family and can turn into suicide. The Church is engaged in this battle for dignity and real freedom, a freedom linked to the truth!

As I express my profound gratitude for this generous distinction, I confess that I am deeply grateful for having learned in the

school of St. Thomas to love the search for truth more and to be following in the footsteps of the Holy Father now, a combatant for human dignity and hope, with the awareness that we will have certain victory because the Lord of the family and life in his paschal mystery *regnat vivus!*

In concluding these brief words of gratitude for the degree of Doctor in Sacred Theology *honoris causa* conferred on me by this illustrious Academic Senate, I would like to say that I attribute this honor not to my own personal merits, but to the significance of the mission which Pope John Paul II has entrusted to me. The future is being built today, perhaps more than in any other historical era, by guarding and fostering the values of the family and life. Efforts must be increased in favor of the culture of life and responsible family policies in a renewed approach to the family's fundamental place in culture and in society.

In this endeavor, I am certain that the strong and vigorous impulse of the Christian community will not be lacking. From January 25-26, 2003, families from all over the world will meet in Manila to celebrate their Fourth World Meeting following the previous memorable meetings in Rome (1994), Rio de Janeiro (1997) and again in Rome during the Great Jubilee of the year 2000. The theme will be: *The Christian Family: Good News for the Third Millennium*. It will be a great opportunity to delve into this reality and mission not only in a first missionary proclamation, but also in the perspective of a New Evangelization to which the Holy Father is urgently calling us. For the Gospel of the family to be renewed with intra-ecclesial vigor and the power of persuasion through example and various forms of proclamation and witness, it is necessary to put the Eucharist at the center, the culmination and source of the sacramental economy, "the very source of Christian marriage" (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 57). The family is a community at the service of man

at the service of the Kingdom, in order to discover a brother in every man. "In each individual, especially in the poor, the weak, and those who suffer or are unjustly treated, love knows how to discover the face of Christ, and discover a fellow human being to be loved and served" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 64).

The opportunity will not be lacking at the Fourth World Meeting of Manila to make an in-depth theological study of the essence and mission of today's family and to enliven the Church and society once more with the beating wings of faith and reason, as the Pope calls Christian thought in the Encyclical *Fides et Ratio*.

In Manila, after the arrival of the first Spanish evangelizers to this blessed Filipino land in the sixteenth century, a tender, deep and filial devotion to the Child Jesus has taken deep roots. May He, the blessed fruit of Mary's virginal womb, support and strengthen our firm hope in the future of the family and life, in accordance with God the Creator's design, and inspire the noble and generous efforts of many persons of good will around the whole world who recognize in the humble and indispensable atmosphere of family life, based on marriage, the brave and powerful heart of a new culture of life.

Thank you very much.

Some Reflections on the Priesthood

PEDRO DEAN, DD

The Pope's letter to priests last Holy Thursday regarding the ministry of the Sacrament of Penance was overshadowed by the crisis in the Church occasioned by the sexual crimes of some priests. Press reports about the letter referred only to the last paragraph of the letter where the Pope said: *"Grave scandal is caused, with the result that a dark shadow of suspicion is cast over all the other fine priests who perform their ministry with honesty and integrity and often with heroic self-sacrifice."*

Solutions to the problem have been proposed by various quarters - abolish celibacy or make it optional, ordain women to the priesthood, let the laity choose their own priests, and so on. But John Paul's letter already gives the solution to the crisis. It's nothing new; he told priests: *"all of us - conscious of human weakness, but trusting in the healing power of divine grace - are called to embrace the **mysterium Cruris** (the mystery of the Cross) and to commit ourselves more fully to the search for holiness."*

The reawakening of the call to holiness received by all the faithful (i.e., the laity, clergy, religious) is one of the main themes

of *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. In fact the Holy Father wrote there that **the commitment to holiness is the first element of all wise "pastoral planning"**. He made reference to this again in his 2001 letter to priests, saying: **"It (holiness) is the basic task of believers, so how much more must it be for us (priests)."**

What is a priest and to what is he called to achieve? *"Our identity has its ultimate source in the charity of the Father. He sent the Son, High Priest and Good Shepherd, and we are united sacramentally with the ministerial priesthood through the action of the Holy Spirit. The life and ministry of the priest are a continuation of the life and the action of the same Christ. This is our identity, our true dignity, the fountain of our joy, the certainty of our life."*¹ Here lies the greatness of the priesthood, as well as the tremendous responsibility that comes with it. It is what made St. Augustine tell his flock: "If I am anxious about being for you, I am consoled by being with you. For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian. In the first there is danger, in the second there is salvation."

What higher dignity can be given to a man than "to continue the life and action of the same Christ" in a sacramental way? And what tremendous consequences for a priest and for the Church if he were to lead a life diametrically opposed to that dignity? The "danger" attendant to the priesthood can only be threatening if the one called to it refuses to follow the holy life of his Master and Lord, Jesus. If the priesthood is not a "job" but a life - the life of Christ on earth - holiness (i.e., the pursuit of holiness) is intimately linked to it. A priest has no other alternative, so to speak, but to be another Christ, the all-Holy God. Certainly, the vocation of an individual priest can be shaken by an unlimited number of causes, summarized in the "concupiscence of the eyes, concupiscence

¹ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis*, 18.

of the flesh, and the pride of life." But what is also certain is that any trial a priest can face is exactly the instrument Jesus gives him to be united to him in His Holy Cross (the *mysterium Cruris*), and turn it into an instrument of sanctification for himself and the whole Church.

At ordination we can imagine that Jesus Our Lord gives the candidate a photograph of Himself. But he tears it into two, giving half of His image to the ordinand, while He keeps the other half. The priest is given the instruction to spend his life looking for the other half, but not in strenuous adventures as if he were searching for the Lost Ark. Rather, he will complete the image by discovering it in his neighbor in need: sinners, the destitute, the ignorant, in children and the old, the sick and the dying; he is to complete it in the silence of the Eucharistic Adoration chapel, and in the Liturgy. Only by doing so will the priest find real fulfillment, "completion".² The trap set by the enemy of God and of His sanctity is to lead the priest to seek fulfillment in worldliness. Chosen among men and sent to the world to bring all souls to God, he may forget his mission and gets sucked in the same turbulence he wants to save souls from. Then follows a frightening spiral down the abyss of pleasure-seeking, wealth-seeking, honors-seeking, because the search for holiness (the

² "Pastoral charity faces the danger, today especially, of being emptied of its meaning through so-called "functionalism". It is not rare, in fact, to perceive, even in some priests, the influence of an erroneous mentality which reduces the ministerial priesthood to strictly functional aspects. To merely play the role of the priest, carrying out a few services and ensuring completion of various tasks would make up the entire priestly existence. Such a reductive conception of the identity of the priest risks pushing their lives towards an emptiness, an emptiness which often comes to be filled by lifestyles not consonant with their ministry". (Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1994, no. 44).

completion of Jesus' image) had long been given up: the *mysterium Cruris* is replaced by the *mysterium iniquitatis*.

Thus, the Pope admonishes priests at the end of his 2002 letter: "*We must beg God in his Providence to prompt a whole-hearted reawakening of those ideals of total self-giving to Christ which are the very foundation of the priestly ministry.*" We might wonder why self-giving to Jesus is the key to happiness for a priest. Boylan suggests that priests should make self-sacrifice and sharing in Christ's Victimhood the central part of their vocation, rather than the other view which "confines it to an active and successful ministry in the service of souls."³ To be victims with Christ is, for the priest, the source of his happiness and fruitfulness. Boylan explains why: "We have laid ourselves down at the altar with and in Christ, and if God chooses to strip us of those things that many men prize, He is not only taking us at our word, He is also fitting us for a heavenly crown of unspeakable glory, and conforming us to the image of His Son. This is a point that must never be forgotten. Just as the Communion is the final action in the sacrifice that commenced with the Offertory, so is union with Christ the final result of our offering of ourselves to God in practice as well as in word during the day. It is by doing the will of God that we truly live up to our title of *Father*, and indeed Our Lord told us that by doing the will of God we become His mother."

Another writer described the priest as a man who has received a dignity and a vocation that makes him a special person, "bearing a message of salvation and yet subject for that very reason to a hard and lonely life (...). If there is anyone who is not allowed to live his own life, that person is the priest; if there is anyone denied the right to have personal problems* that person is the priest; if there is anyone to whom all human reward or any kind of

³ Boylan, E.. *The Spiritual Life of the Priest*, Mercier Press. 1962. p. 72.

selfishness is forbidden, that person is the priest for, as Paul VI said, he is a man who lives not for himself but for others, he is a man of the community. There is no more heroic task than his, no more difficult situation, no greater responsibility. Neither however, is there anything more sublime, more self-sacrificing, more exciting than the priesthood."⁴

The "Integral Renewal of the Clergy" is one of the pastoral priorities of the National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal held in January 2001. It is an encouraging response of the whole Church in the Philippines to the Holy Father's call for a renewed spirituality and evangelization at the start of the new millennium. At the hub of the various aspects of Church renewal is the family, as was emphasized by Archbishop Quevedo, the CBCP President. And rightly so, for without sturdy hub, the wheel of the Church and society at large will collapse. If we look at the Church as a cart running on the wheels of Christian families, priests are the beasts of burden pulling the cart. This image may not be appealing, but that's meaning of the priesthood as ministry, service. A priest may be a spiritual leader, but a "servant-leader". On his neck and back is the weight of the responsibility towards the holiness of the People of God. His only comfort is the assurance of the Good Shepherd directing the cart: "my yoke is easy and my burden is light." As the beast of burden would get lost if he were to seek greener pastures on his own, so would a priest if he were to separate himself from the Good Shepherd, the only one who can lead him to refreshing waters, such that "there is nothing more he will want." A priest, therefore, shares more effectively in the mission of the Good Shepherd in the measure he sincerely shares in the Victimhood of the Lamb.

⁴ Suarez, R, *About Being a Priest*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 1974, p. 14.

Renewal of the clergy is equivalent to renewing the clergy's energies. Thus, it seems only logical that the Holy Father would choose the topic of the Sacrament of Penance as his theme for his letters to priests this year and last. *"The Sacrament of Reconciliation, essential for every Christian life, is especially a source of support, guidance and healing for the priestly life"* (Letter, 2001). *"With joy and trust let us rediscover this sacrament. Let us experience it above all for ourselves, as a deeply-felt need and as a grace which we constantly look for, in order to restore vigor and enthusiasm to our journey of holiness and to our ministry"* (Letter, 2002).

The Pope's meditations on the encounter between Zacchaeus and Our Lord (in his Letter this year) is very much applicable as well to the ministers of His mercy. Zacchaeus, whose name was said in contempt by his neighbors, was called by his personal name by Our Lord. That was the key to his conversion, the Pope says, because Jesus looked at him as an individual, a special person. Even before Mercy entered Zacchaeus' home, Mercy had entered already knocked at his heart. A priest may end up being a Zacchaeus, but since he had heard at one point in his life the voice of Jesus calling him by name to follow His footsteps, the same voice will resound in his heart all his life. *"Mercy is the absolutely free initiative by which God has chosen us: You did not choose me but I chose you (Jn J 5:16). Mercy is his deigning to call us to act as his representatives, though he knows that we are sinners ... Let us then rediscover our vocation as a "mystery of mercy"* (Letter, 2001).

The Ecclesiology of Vatican II*

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Just after the First World War, Romano Guardini coined an expression that quickly became a slogan for German Catholics: "An event of enormous importance is taking place: the Church is awakening within souls." The result of this awakening was ultimately the Second Vatican Council. Through its various documents it expressed and made part of the patrimony of the whole Church something that, during four decades full of ferment and hope (1920 to 1960), had been maturing in knowledge gained through faith. To understand Vatican II one must look back on this period and seek to discern, at least in outline, the currents and tendencies that came together in the Council. I will present the ideas that came to the fore during this period and then describe the fundamental elements of the Council's teaching on the Church.

* On the afternoon of 15 September 2001, at the invitation of Archbishop Mario Milano, His Eminence, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, opened the Pastoral Congress of the Diocese of Aversa (Italy) dedicated to a re-reading of the documents of the Second Vatican Council. This is a translation of Cardinal Ratzinger's opening lecture in Italian.

I. The Church the Body of Christ

1. The Image of the Mystical Body

"The Church is awakening within souls." Guardini's expression had been wisely formulated, since it finally recognized and experienced the Church as something within us - not as an institution outside us but something that lives within us.

If until that time we had thought of the Church primarily as a structure or organization, now at last we began to realize that we ourselves were the Church. The Church is much more than an organization: it is the organism of the Holy Spirit, something that is alive, that takes hold of our inmost being. This consciousness found verbal expression with the concept of the "Mystical Body of Christ", a phrase describing a new and liberating experience of the Church. At the very end of his life, in the same year the constitution on the Church was published by the Council, Guardini wrote: the Church "is not an institution devised and built by men... but a living reality... It lives still throughout the course of time. Like all living realities it develops, it changes... and yet in the very depths of its being it remains the same; its inmost nucleus is Christ... To the extent that we look upon the Church as organization... like an association... we have not yet arrived at a proper understanding of it. Instead, it is a living reality and our relationship with it ought to be - life" (*La Chiesa del Signore*, [English translation: "The Church of the Lord"]; Morcelliana, Brescia 1967, p. 160).

Today, it is difficult to communicate the enthusiasm and joy this realization generated at the time. In the era of liberalism that preceded the First World War, the Catholic Church was looked upon as a fossilized organization, stubbornly opposed to all modern achievements. Theology had so concentrated on the question of the primacy as to make the Church appear to be essentially a

centralized organization that one defended staunchly but which somehow one related to from the outside. Once again it became clear that the Church was more than this - she is something we all bring forward in faith in a living way, just as the Church brings us forward. It became clear that the Church has experienced organic growth over the centuries, and continues to grow even today. Through the Church the mystery of the Incarnation is alive today: Christ continues to move through time. If we were to ask ourselves what element present from the very beginning could still be found in Vatican II, our answer would be: the Christological definition of the Church. J.A. Mohler, a leader in the revival of Catholic theology after the devastation of the Enlightenment, once said: a certain erroneous theology could be caricatured with the short phrase: "In the beginning Christ created the hierarchy and had thus taken adequate care of the Church until the end of time." Opposed to this concept is the fact that the Church is the Mystical Body; Christ never belongs just to the past, He is always and above all the present and the future. The Church is the presence of Christ: He is contemporary with us and we are His contemporaries. The Church lives from this: from the fact that Christ is present in our hearts and it is there that Christ forms His Church. That is why the first word of the Church is Christ and not herself. The Church is healthy to the extent that all attention is focused on Him. The Second Vatican Council placed of its deliberations; the fundamental text on the Church begins with the words: *Lumen gentium cum sit Christus*: "since Christ is the Light of the World... the Church is a mirror of His glory; she reflects His splendour." If we want to understand the Second Vatican Council correctly, we must always go back to this opening statement....

Next with this point of departure, we must establish both the feature of her interiority and of her communitarian nature. The Church grows from within and moves outwards, not *vice-versa*

Above all, she is the sign of the most intimate communion with Christ. She is formed primarily in a life of prayer, the sacraments and the fundamental attitudes of faith, hope and love. Thus if someone should ask what must I do to become Church and to grow like the Church, the reply must be: you must become a person who lives faith, hope, and charity. What builds the Church is prayer and the communion of the sacraments, in them the prayer of the Church comes to meet us. Last summer I met a parish priest who told me that for many years there hadn't been a single vocation to the priesthood from his parish. What ought he do? We cannot manufacture vocations, it is the Lord who raises them up. Should we therefore stand by helpless? The priest decided to make a pilgrimage every year, along and difficult pilgrimage to the Marian Shrine of Altotting to pray for vocations, and invited those who shared in this intention to join him in the pilgrimage and common prayer. Year after year the number of participants in this pilgrimage grew until finally, this year, the whole village with great joy, celebrated the first Mass in living memory said by a priest from the parish....

The Church grows from within: this is the meaning of the expression "Body of Christ". The phrase implies something more: Christ has formed a body for himself. If I want to find Him and make Him mine, I am directly called to become a humble and complete and full member of his Body, and, by becoming one of His members, becoming an organ of his Body in this world, I will be so for eternity. The idea of liberal theology would be interesting,, the Church would be a wretched reality, contradicts this understanding completely. Christ gives Himself only in His Body, and never as a pure ideal. This means that He gives Himself, and the others, in the uninterrupted communion that endures through time and is His Body. It means that the Church is not an idea, it is a Body. The scandal of becoming flesh that Jesus' incarnation

caused so many of His contemporaries, is repeated in the "scandalous character" of the Church. Jesus' statement is valid in this instance: "Blessed is he who is not scandalized in me."

The communitarian nature of the Church necessarily entails its character as "we". The Church is not somewhere apart from us, it is we who constitute the Church. No one person can say "I am the Church", but each one of us can and ought to say, "we are the Church". This "we" does not represent an isolated group, but rather a group that exists with in the entire community of all Christ's members, living and dead. This is how a group can genuinely say: "we are the Church". Here is the Church, in this open "we" that breaches social and political boundaries, and the boundary between heaven and earth as well. We are the Church. This gives rise to a co-responsibility and also the possibility of collaborating personally. From this understanding there derives the right to criticize but our criticism must be above all self-criticism. Let us repeat: the Church is not "somewhere else"; nor is she "someone else". We ourselves build the Church. These ideas matured and led directly to the Council. Everything said about the common responsibility of the laity, and the legal forms that were established to facilitate the intelligent exercise of responsibility, are the result of this current of thought.

Finally, the concept of the development and therefore of the historical dynamic of the Church belongs to this theme. A body remains identical to itself over the course of its life due to the fact that in the life process it constantly renews itself. For the great English Cardinal, Newman, the idea of development was the true and proper bridge to his conversion to Catholicism. I believe that the idea of development belongs to those numerous fundamental concepts of Catholicism that are far from being adequately explored. Once again it is Vatican II to which we owe the first solemn formulation of this idea in a magisterial document.

Whoever wants to attach himself solely to the literal interpretation of the Scriptures or to the forms of the Church of the Fathers imprisons Christ in "yesterday". The result is either a wholly sterile faith that has nothing to say to our times, or the arrogant assumption of the right to skip over 2,000 years of history, consign them to the dustbin of mistakes, and try to figure out what a Christianity would look like either according to Scripture or according to Jesus. The only possible result will be an artificial creation that we ourselves have made, devoid of any consistency. Genuine identity with the beginning in Christ can only exist where there is a living continuity that has developed the beginning and preserved the beginning precisely through this development.

2. *Eucharistic Ecclesiology*

Let us go back and look at developments in the pre-Conciliar era. Reflection on the Mystical Body of Christ marked the first phase of the Church's interior re-discovery; it began with St. Paul and led to placing in the foreground the presence of Christ and the dynamics of what is alive (in Him and us). Further research led to a fresh awareness. Above all, more than anyone else, the great French theologian Henri de Lubac in his magnificent and learned studies made it clear that in the beginning the term "*corpus mysticum*" referred to the Eucharist. For St. Paul and the Fathers of the Church the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ was inseparably connected with the concept of the Eucharist in which the Lord is bodily present and which He gives us His Body as food. This is how a Eucharistic ecclesiology came into existence.

What do we mean today by "Eucharistic ecclesiology"? I will attempt to answer this question with a brief mention of some fundamental points. The first point is that Jesus' Last Supper could be define as the event that founded the Church. Jesus gave His followers this Liturgy of Death and Resurrection and at the same

time He gave them the Feast of Life. In the Last Supper he repeats the covenant of Sinai - or rather what at Sinai was a simple sign or prototype, that becomes now a complete reality: the communion in blood and life between God and man. Clearly the Last Supper anticipates the Cross and the Resurrection and presupposes them, otherwise it would be an empty gesture. This is why the Fathers of the Church could use a beautiful image and say that the Church was born from the pierced side of the Lord, from which flowed blood and water. When I state that the Last Supper is the beginning of the Church, I am actually saying the same thing, from another point of view. This formula means that the Eucharist binds all men together, and not just with one another, but with Christ; in this way it makes them "Church". At the same time the formula describes the fundamental constitution of the Church: the Church exists in Eucharistic communities. The Church's Mass is her constitution, because the Church is, in essence, a Mass (sent out: "missa"), a service of God, and therefore a service of man and a service for the transformation of the world.

The Mass is the Church's form, that means that through it she develops an entirely original relationship that exists nowhere else, a relationship of multiplicity and of unity. In each celebration of the Eucharist, the Lord is really present. He is risen and dies no more. He can no longer be divided into different parts. He always gives Himself completely and entirely. This is why the Council states: "This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local communities of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called Churches in the New Testament. For in their locality these are the new People called by God, in the Holy Spirit and with great trust (cf. 1 Thes. 1,5).... In these communities, though frequently small and poor, or living in the diaspora, Christ is present, and in virtue of His power there is brought together one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church" (*Lumen*

Gentium, n. 26). This means that the ecclesiology of local Churches derives from the formulation of the Eucharistic ecclesiology. This is a typical feature of Vatican II that presents the internal and sacramental foundation of the doctrine of collegiality about which we will speak later.

For a correct understanding of the Council's teaching, we must first look more closely at what exactly it said. Vatican II was aware of the concerns of both Orthodox and Protestant theology and integrated them into a more ample Catholic understanding. In Orthodox theology the idea of Eucharistic ecclesiology was first expressed by exiled Russian theologians in opposition to the pretensions of Roman centralism. They affirmed that insofar as it possesses Christ entirely, every Eucharistic community is already, *in se*, the Church. Consequently, external unity with other communities is not a constitutive element of the Church. Therefore, they concluded that unity with Rome is not a constitutive element of the Church. Such a unity would be a beautiful thing since it would represent the fullness of Christ to the external world, but it is not essential since nothing would be added to the totality of Christ. The Protestant understanding of the Church was moving in the same direction. Luther could no longer recognize the Spirit of Christ in the universal Church; he directly took that Church to be an instrument of the anti-Christ. Nor could he see the Protestant State Churches of the Reformation as Churches in the proper sense of the word. They were only social, political entities necessary for specific purposes and dependent on political powers - nothing more. According to Luther the Church existed in the community. Only the assembly that listens to the Word of God in a specific place is the Church. He replaced the word "Church" with "community" (*Gemeinde*). Church became a negative concept.

If we go back now to the Council text certain nuances become evident. The text does not simply say, "The Church is entirely present in each community that celebrates the Eucharist", rather it states: "This Church of Christ is truly present in *all legitimate local communities of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called Churches.*" Two elements here are of great importance: to be a Church the community must be "legitimate"; they are legitimate when they are "united with their pastors". What does this mean? In the first place, no one can make a Church by himself. A group cannot simply get together, read the New Testament and declare: "At present we are the Church because the Lord is present whenever two or three are gathered in His name." The element of "receiving" belongs essentially to the Church, just as faith comes from, "hearing" and is not the result of one's decision or reflection. Faith is converging with something I could neither imagine nor produce on my own; faith has to come to meet me. We call the structure of this encounter, a "Sacrament". It is part of the fundamental form of a sacrament that it be received and not self-administered. No one can baptize himself. No one can ordain himself. No one can forgive his own sins. Perfect repentance cannot remain something interior - of its essence it demands the form of encounter of the Sacrament. This too is a result of a sacrament's fundamental structure as an encounter [with Christ]. For this reason communion with oneself is not just an infraction of the external provisions of Canon Law, but it is an attack on the innermost nature of a sacrament. That a priest can administer this unique sacrament, and only this sacrament, to himself is part of the *mysterium tremendum* in which the Eucharist involves him. In the Eucharist, the priest acts "*in persona Christi*", in the person of Christ [the Head]; at the same time he represents Christ while remaining a sinner who lives completely by accepting Christ's Gift.

One cannot make the Church but only receive her; one receives her from where she already is, where she is really present: the sacramental community of Christ's Body moving through history. It will help us to understand this difficult concept if we add something: "legitimate communities." Christ is everywhere whole. This is the first important formulation of the Council in union with our Orthodox brothers. At the same time Christ is everywhere only one, so I can possess the one Lord only in the unity that He is, in the unity of all those who are also His Body and who through the Eucharist must nevermore become it. Therefore, the reciprocal unity of all those communities who celebrate the Eucharist is not something externally added to Eucharistic ecclesiology, but rather its internal condition: in unity there is One. This is why the Council recalls the proper responsibility of communities, but excludes any self-sufficiency. The Council develops an ecclesiology in which being Catholic, namely being in communion with believers in all places and in all times, is not simply an external element of an organizational form, it represents grace coming from within and is at the same time a visible sign of the grace of the Lord who alone can create unity by breaching countless boundaries.

II. The Church, as the People of God

After the initial enthusiasm that greeted the discovery of the idea of Body of Christ, scholars analyzed and gradually began to refine the concept and make corrections in two directions. We have already referred to the first of these corrections in the work of Henri de Lubac. He made concrete the idea of the Body of Christ by working out a Eucharistic ecclesiology and opened it in this way to concrete question about the juridical ordering of the Church and the reciprocal relations between local Churches and the universal Church. The other form of correction began in

Germany in the 1930's, where some theologians were critical of the fact that with the idea of the Mystical Body certain relationships were not clear between the visible and the invisible, law and grace, order and life. They therefore proposed the concept of "People of God", found above all in the Old Testament, as a broader description of the Church to which one could more easily apply sociological and juridical categories. While the Mystical Body of Christ would certainly remain an important "image", by itself it could not meet the request of theology to express things using "concepts".

Initially this criticism of the idea of the Body of Christ was somewhat superficial. Further study of the Body of Christ uncovered its positive content; the concept of the "People of God", along with the concept of the Body of Christ, entered the ecclesiology of the Council. One wondered if the image of the Mystical Body might be too narrow a starting point to define the many forms of belonging to the Church now found in the tangle of human history. If we use the image of a body to describe "belonging" we are limited only to the form of representation as "member". Either one is not a member, there are no other possibilities. One can then ask if the image of the body was too restrictive, since there manifestly existed in reality intermediate degrees of belonging. The Constitution on the Church found it helpful for this purpose to use the concept of "the People of God". It could describe the relationship of non-Catholic Christians to the Church as being "in communion" and that of non-Christian as being "ordered" to the Church where in both cases one relies on the idea of the People of God (*Lumen Gentium*, nn. 15, 16).

In one respect one can say that the Council introduced the concept of "the People of God" above all as an ecumenical bridge. It applies to another perspective as well: the rediscovery of the Church after the First World War that initially was a phenomenon

common to both Catholics and Protestants. Certainly the liturgical movement was by no means limited to the Catholic Church. This shared character gave rise to reciprocal criticism. The idea of the Body of Christ was developed within the Catholic Church, when the Church was designated as "Christ who continues to live on earth" and so the Church was described as the incarnation of the Son that continues to the end of time. This idea provoked opposition among Protestants who saw in the teaching an intolerable identifying of the Church herself with Christ. According to Protestants the Church was in a way adoring herself and making herself infallible. Gradually, the idea struck Catholic thinkers who, even though they did not go that far, found that this understanding of the Church made her every declaration and ministerial act so definitive that it made any criticism appear to be an attack on Christ himself and simply forgot the human, at times far too human, element of the Church. The Christological distinction had to be clearly emphasized: the Church is not identical with Christ, but she stands before Him. She is a Church of sinners, ever in need of purification and renewal, ever needing to become Church. The idea of reform became a decisive element of the concept of the People of God, while it would be difficult to develop the idea of reform within the framework of the Body of Christ.

There is a third factor that favored the idea of the "People of God". In 1939 the Evangelical exegete, Ernst Kasemann gave his monograph on the Letter to the Hebrews the title, *The Pilgrim People of God*. In the framework of Council discussions, this title became right away a slogan because it made something become more clearly understood in the debates on the Constitution on the Church: the Church has not yet reached her goal. Her true and proper hope still lies ahead of her. The "eschatological" import of the concept of Church became clear. The phrase conveys the unity of salvation history which comprises both Israel and the

Church in her pilgrim journey. The phrase expresses the historical nature of the pilgrim Church that will not be wholly herself until the paths of time have been traversed and have blossomed in the hands of God. It describes the unity of the People of God amid the variety, as in all peoples, of different ministries and services; yet above and beyond all distinctions, all are pilgrims in the one community of the pilgrim People of God. In broad outline, if one wants to sum up what elements relating to the concept "People of God" were important for the Council, one could say that the phrase "People of God" conveyed the historical nature of the Church described the unity of God's history with man, the internal unity of God's people that also goes beyond the frontiers of sacramental states of life. It conveys the eschatological dynamic, the provisional and fragmentary nature of the Church ever in need of renewal; and finally, it expresses the ecumenical dimension, that is the variety of ways in which communion and ordering to the Church can and do exist even beyond the boundaries of the Catholic Church.

However, commentators very soon completely handed the term "people" in the concept "People of God" to a general political interpretation. Among the proponents of liberation theology it was taken to mean "people" in the Marxist sense, in opposition to the ruling classes, or more popular sovereignty at long last being applied to the Church. This led to large-scale debates on Church structures. On occasion the expression was understood in a peculiarly Western sense as "democratization" or more in the sense of the so-called Eastern "People's Republics". Gradually this "verbal fireworks" (N. Lohfink) died down either because the power games ended in exhaustion and gave way to the ordinary work of parish councils, or because solid theological research had irrefutably demonstrated the impossibility of politicizing a concept that had arisen in an entirely different context. Bochum Werner

Berg provides an example of the meticulous exegesis that characterized this theological research when he affirmed: "in spite of the small number of passages that mention the 'People of God' (it is a rare expression in the Bible) one common element is immediately apparent: the expression 'People of God' describes the relationship with God, the connection with God, the link between God and those designated as the People of God, it is therefore a 'vertical relationship'. The expression does not lend itself easily to a description of the hierarchical structure of this community, especially if People of God" is used in "contrast" to the ministers...". If we begin with the biblical meaning of this expression it can no longer be easily understood as a cry of protest against the ministers: "We are the People of God". Josef Meyer zu Schlochtern, the Professor of Fundamental Theology at Paderborn, concludes his discussion of the concept "People of God" with an observation on Vatican II's Constitution on the Church. The document concludes by "depicting the Trinitarian structure as the foundation of the final determination of the Church...". The discussion is brought back to the essential point: the Church does not exist for herself; rather, she is God's instrument to gather mankind in Himself and to prepare for that time when "God will be all in all" (I Cor 15,28). The very concept of God was left out of all the "fireworks" surrounding this expression, thus depriving the expression of its meaning. A Church which existed only for herself would be useless. People would realize this immediately. The crisis of the Church reflected in the expression "People of God" is a "crisis of God". It derives from our abandoning the essential. All that remains is a struggle for power. This sort of thing is already abundantly present in the world - there is no need for the Church to enter this arena.

III. The Ecclesiology of Communion

Around the time of the extraordinary Synod of 1985 which attempted to make an assessment of the 20 years since the Council there was a renewed effort to synthesize the Council's ecclesiology. The synthesis involved one basic concept: the ecclesiology of communion. I was very much pleased with this new focus in ecclesiology and I endeavored, to the extent I was able, to help work it out. First of all one must admit that the word "communio" did not occupy a central place in the Council. All the same if properly understood it can serve as a synthesis of the essential elements of the Council's ecclesiology. All the essential elements of the Christian concept of "communio" can be found in the famous passage from the First Letter of Saint John (1,3); it is a frame of reference for the correct Christian understanding of "communio". That which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship (communio) with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing this that our joy may be complete". The point of departure of *communio* is clearly evident in this passage: the union with the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who comes to mankind through the proclamation of the Church. Fellowship (*communio*) among men is born here and merges into fellowship (*communio*) with the One and Triune God. One gains access to communion with God through the realization of God's communion with man - it is Christ in person. To meet Christ creates communion with Him and therefore with the Father in the Holy Spirit. This unites men with one another. The goal of all this is the fullness of joy: the Church carries in her bosom an eschatological dynamic. This expression "fullness of joy" recalls the farewell address of Jesus, His Paschal mystery and the Lord's return in the Easter apparitions which prefigure His definitive return in the new world. "You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy... I will see you

again and your hearts will rejoice... ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full (Jn 16, 20.22.24). If this verse is compared to the invitation to prayer in St. Luke (Lk 11, 13) it is apparent that "joy" and the Holy Spirit" are equivalent. Although John does not explicitly mention the Holy Spirit in his first Epistle (1,3) he is hidden within the word "joy". In this biblical context the word "communio" has a theological, Christological, soteriological and ecclesiological characteristic. It enjoys a sacramental dimension that is absolutely explicit in St. Paul: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion in the body of Christ? Because there is *one* bread, we who are many are *one* body..." (1 Cor 10, 16ff.). The ecclesiology of communion at its very foundation is a Eucharistic ecclesiology. It is very close to that Eucharistic ecclesiology that Orthodox theologians so convincingly developed during the past century. In it - *as we have already seen* - ecclesiology becomes more concrete while remaining totally spiritual, transcendent and eschatological. In the Eucharist, Christ, present in the bread and wine and giving Himself anew, builds the Church as His Body and through His Risen Body He unites us to the one and triune God and to each other. The Eucharist celebrated in different places is universal at the same time, because there is only one Christ and only a single body of Christ. The Eucharist comprehends the priestly service of "*repraesentatio Christi*" as well as that network of service, the synthesis of unity and multiplicity which is expressed in the term "communio". Without any possible doubt one could say that this concept conveys a synthesis of ecclesiology which combines the discourse of the Church with the discourse of God, and to life through God and with God. This synthesis assembles all the essential intentions of Vatican II ecclesiology and connects them with one another in an appropriate fashion.

For these reasons I was both grateful and happy when the 1985 Synod placed "communio" at the centre of their study. The following years demonstrated the fact that no word is safe from misunderstanding, not even the best and most profound word. To the extent that "communio" became an easy slogan, it was devaluated and distorted. As happened to the concept 'People of God', one must point to a growing horizontal understanding that abandoned the concept of God. The ecclesiology of communion was reduced to a consideration of relations between the local Church and the universal Church; this in turn was reduced to the problem of determining the area of competence of each. Naturally the egalitarian thesis once more gained ground: only full equality was possible in "communio". Here again was the exact same argument that had exercised the disciples about who was the greatest amongst them. Obviously this was something that would not be resolved within a single generation. Mark's description of the incident is the most forceful. On the road from Jerusalem Jesus spoke to His Disciples about His coming Passion for the third time. When they arrived at Capernaum He asked them what they had been talking about on the road. "They were silent" because they had been discussing who among them would be the greatest - a sort of discussion about the primacy (Mk 9, 33-37). Isn't it just the same today? The Lord is going towards His passion, while the Church, and in her Christ, is suffering and, we on the other hand are entangled in our favorite discussion: who come first with the power. If He were to come among us and ask what we were talking about we would blush and be silent.

This does not mean that there should be no discussion of good government and the division of responsibility in the Church. It is certainly true that there are imbalances that need correcting. We should watch for and root out an excessive Roman centralization that is always a danger. But questions of this sort ought not to

distract us from the true mission of the Church: the Church should not be proclaiming herself but God. It is only to assure that this is done in the purest possible way, that there is criticism within the Church. Criticism should insure a correlation between discourse on God and common service. To sum it up, it is no accident that Jesus' words "the first shall be last and the last first" occur more than once in the Gospel tradition. They are like a mirror constantly focused on us all.

Faced with the post-1985 reduction of the concept of "communio", the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith thought it appropriate to prepare a "Letter to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion". The Letter was issued on 28 May, 1992. Today, any theologian concerned about his reputation feels obliged to criticize all documents from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. Our Letter met with a storm of criticism - very few parts of the text met with approval. The phrase that provoked the most controversy was this statement: "The universal Church in her essential mystery is a reality that ontologically and temporally is prior to every particular Church" (cf. n. 9). There was a brief reference to this statement being based on the Patristic notion that the one, unique Church precedes the creation of particular Churches and gives birth to them. The Fathers were reviving a rabbinical concept that the Torah and Israel were pre-existent. Creation was conceived as providing space for the will of God. This Will needed a people who would live for the Will of God and would make it the Light of the world. Since the Fathers were convinced of the final identity of the Church and Israel, they could not envision the Church has something accidental, only recently created; in this gathering of people under the Will of God the Fathers recognized the internal theology of creation. Beginning with Christology this image was amplified and deepened: they

explained history - under the influence of the Old Testament - as a story of love between God and man. God finds and prepares a Bride for His Son - the unique Bride who is the unique Church. In the light of Genesis 2,24, where man and woman become "two in one flesh" the image of the Bride merges with the idea of the Church as the Body of Christ - an analogy derived from the Eucharistic liturgy. The unique Body of Christ is prepared; Christ and the Church will be "two in one flesh", *one* body and in this way "God will be everything to everyone". The ontological priority of the universal Church - the unique Church, the unique Body, the unique Bride - *vis-a-vis* the empirical, concrete manifestations of various, particular Churches is so obvious to me that I find it difficult to understand the objections raised against it. These objections only seem possible if one will not or cannot recognize the great Church conceived by God - possibly out of despair at her earthly shortcomings. These objections look like theological ravings. All that would remain is the empirical image of mutually related Churches and their conflicts. This would mean that the Church as a theological theme is cancelled. If one can only see the Church as a human institution, all that remains is desolation. In this case one has abandoned not only ecclesiology of the Fathers, but the ecclesiology of the New Testament and the understanding of Israel in the Old Testament as well. It is not just the later deutero-Pauline letters and the Apocalypse that affirm the ontological priority of the universal Church to the particular Churches (reaffirmed by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith). This concept can be found in the great Pauline letters: in the Letter to the Galatians, the Apostle speaks about the heavenly Jerusalem not as something great and eschatological, but as something which precedes us: "This Jerusalem is our mother" (Gal 4,26). H. Schlier comments that for St. Paul, inspired by Jewish tradition, the Jerusalem above is the new aeon. For St. Paul this new aeon already exists "in the Christian Church. For him the Church is the heavenly Jerusalem in her Children".

Let me conclude. To understand the ecclesiology of Vatican II one cannot ignore chapters 4 to 7 of the Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. These chapters discuss the laity, the universal call to holiness, the religious and the eschatological orientation of the Church. In these chapters the inner goal of the Church the most essential part of its being, comes once again to the fore: holiness, conformity to God. There must exist in the world space for God, where he can dwell freely so that the world becomes His "Kingdom". Holiness is something greater than a moral quality. It is the presence of God with men, of men with God; it is God's "tent" pitched amongst men in our midst (cf. Jn 1,14). It is a new birth - not from flesh and blood but from God (Jn 1,13). Orientation towards holiness is one and the same as eschatological orientation. Beginning with Jesus' message it is fundamental for the Church. The Church exists to become God's dwelling place in the world, to become "holiness". This is the only reason there should be any struggle in the Church - and not for precedence or for the first place. All of this is repeated and synthesized in the last chapter of the Constitution on the Church that is dedicated to the Mother of the Lord.

As everyone knows, the question of dedicating a specific document to Mary was widely debated. In any event I believe it was appropriate to insert the Marian element directly into the doctrine on the Church. In this way the point of departure for our consideration is once more apparent: the Church is not an apparatus, nor a social institution, nor one social institution among many others. It is a person. It is a woman. It is a Mother. It is alive. A Marian understanding of the Church is totally opposed to the concept of the Church as a bureaucracy or a simple organization. We cannot make the Church, we must be the Church. We are the Church, the Church is in us only to the extent that our faith more than action forges our being. Only by being Marian,

can we become the Church. At its very beginning the Church was not made, but given birth. She existed in the soul of Mary from the moment she uttered her *fiat*. This is the most profound will of the Council: the Church should be awakened in our souls. Mary shows us the way.

Let Us Return to the Lord

JAIME CARD. SIN, DD

We are facing a difficult phase in our life as a church. The fall of a few of our clergy has dealt pain on the church as a whole. There is a crisis in the priesthood. We are in pain. But the pain pushes us to the road towards healing. We want to be healed. We want to be renewed.

We recognize this as a work of sin. But sin is a sham. The power of God's love exceeds that of sin, the forceful river of evil is less powerful than the fruitful water of forgiveness: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more" (Rom 5:20). We will pass through this test and we will see ourselves stronger. We believe in grace. We believe in the power of faith and prayer.

May 31 is the Feast of the Visitation. We remember Mary who visited her cousin Elizabeth who was in need. Mary is always present to those who are in want. We believe in the Blessed Mother's strong intercession. And so I encourage the public recitation of the 15 mysteries of the rosary. I wish the priests to lead the praying of the rosary. Let us together pray for the healing of the wounds that priests may have inflicted to the members of

the Body of Christ. Let us implore our heavenly mother to comfort the wounded and strengthen those in need of healing. Let us ask the Lord to forgive His ministers who reneged on their solemn vows, for those who have been blinded by materialism, for those who are indifferent to the sacramental brotherhood, and for those who need to return to the Father's embrace.

June 6 will be a day of fasting by priests. I call on all the diocesan and religious clergy of the Archdiocese to gather at Villa San Miguel on that day from 7:30 am to 2:00 pm for communal prayer, fasting and sacrifice. We will listen to one another's confessions, fast and pray for one another. I hope you will find time to participate in this very important meeting. There is no excuse from this spiritual exercise.

On June 7 and 8, Feast of the Hearts of Jesus and Mary, I direct all parishes, religious communities and chaplaincies to hold holy hours of reparation from 11:00 pm to June 7 to 1:00 am of June 8. This is a mandatory activity in the archdiocese. Let us unite our hearts and minds in prayer. The Sacred Heart of Jesus is the source of over-flowing mercy. The Immaculate Heart of Mary is "full of grace." Let us all pray that the hearts of our priests be modeled to the Hearts of Jesus and Mary. A priestly heart is a merciful and graceful heart.

Our solution to the priests' bashing in media is prayer, fasting and penance. What the people need now is enlightenment and guidance. Let us not confuse them. As your father, I ask you to refrain from media interviews at this time. Turn the media to God, not to us.

In these difficult times, we recognize our need for mercy and grace. Mercy and grace are antidote to the pain of sin. From mercy, the healing power of forgiveness flows. From grace, love blooms. We are stained but beautiful. Mercy and grace make us beautiful.

May God, rich in mercy and grace, bless us all.

Cases & Inquiries

JAVIER GONZALEZ, OP

TRANSFER FROM ONE RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE TO ANOTHER

Is it possible for a member of a Religious Institute who is already in perpetual vows to transfer from his/her institute to another religious institute? If so, what would be the procedure and the effects of such transfer? Would it be the same procedure for the transfer to a Secular Institute or to a Society of Apostolic Life ? Finally, what about if after having spent some time in the new Institute the transferee changes his/her mind and decides to return to his/her former Institute? Would he/she still have the right to be accepted back there?

* *

It is not difficult to answer to these questions concerning the transfer of a religious from one institute to another or from an institute to a society of apostolic life. Thus the first question about the possibility of such transfer has a simple answer, namely, "yes",

it is something possible. Besides it is contemplated in the Code of Canon Law, where we can even find a brief description of the process (cf. cc. 684-685).

1. The Procedure for the Transfer

A transfer occurs when a member of an institute of consecrated life becomes so attracted to the nature, spirit, and end of another institute that he or she initiates the process to move to the new institute. This fact is not uncommon nowadays. For instance, I myself know of several cases of members of institutes of active life who, after years of consecration, feel that their "real" vocation is for contemplative life and thus long to transfer to a cloistered community.

The whole process naturally starts by the religious' disclosure of such personal attraction towards another institute or community to their respective Superiors, followed by an appeal to their understanding and eventually the formal request to start taking the necessary steps. On their part, the Superiors of the institute from which the person wishes to transfer should consider the suitability of the transferring religious and be most sincere in appraising the reasons for the request before starting the process.

Let us say from the very start that the transfer of a perpetually professed religious from one institute to another has never been regarded favorably by the Church and that requests for such transfers have been generally discouraged by ecclesiastical authorities, although permissions have been granted more easily if the transfer was to an institute of more austere lifestyle.

In any case, the canonical procedure for the transfer is as follows:

a. Transfer from one Religious Institute to another

(1) First, it is necessary to obtain the permission of the supreme Moderators of both institutes, who, in turn, need the prior consent of their respective councils. This requirement affects to the validity of the Superior's permission and, therefore, to the validity of the transfer itself.

(2) Then the member shall complete a probationary period of "at least three years" (c. 684 §2). The same canon 684 establishes that "the institute's own law is to determine the time and manner of the probation," which means that although the *minimum* probationary period of three years cannot be validly reduced, however, it could be extended to a longer period by the proper law. The "manner" refers to things like the specific house for the probation, the program of activities, the religious person in charge, etc. Being a perpetually professed member, this probationary period is not a true novitiate, though it surely provides the religious with ample opportunity to understand the demands of a new way of life and the institute with sufficient time to assess the suitability of the individual.

(3) On completion of the probationary period four possibilities may take place, namely, either (a) that the religious is judged suitable and admitted to perpetual profession in the new institute; (b) that he/she is not admitted to profession in the new institute; (c) that he/she refuses to make profession in the new institute and decides to return to his/her former one; or (d) that he/she decides not to remain in religious life altogether.

If the religious is admitted, with the profession in the new institute he/she becomes a member of it with all rights and privileges. If the religious is not admitted or refuses to make profession in the new institute, he/she is to return immediately to the original institute, to which he/she still belongs. Finally, if the

religious is not admitted in the new institute or refuses to make profession in it but refuses also to return immediately to the original one, then he/she will have to obtain an indult of secularization.

The process of transfer normally ends with the perpetual profession of the religious in the new institute.

b. Transfer of a Religious from one Autonomous Monastery to another

The other monastery may be of the same Order, of the same Federation or of the same Confederation. The process is typically the same as the described above, although with some minor differences, namely, for the transfer it is necessary the consent of the Major Superiors of both monasteries. It is likewise needed the consent of the *chapter* [i.e. of the entire community] of the monastery that accepts the religious. The reason is because accepting a religious who comes from another autonomous monastery is a matter that affects the whole community and, therefore, it is applied the legal normal that reads: "What concerns to all must be approved by all." The proper law may prescribe other requisites. (In our opinion, it would be also good that the *chapter*, that is, the entire community of the original monastery gave also its *consent*. It would be simply to apply the aforementioned rule of law. The reason is because with the "loss" of a religious the original monastery may be greatly affected.) There is no need of a new profession.

c. Transfer from a Religious Institute to a Secular Institute or to a Society of Apostolic Life

A transfer from a religious institute, to a secular institute or a society of apostolic life and a transfer from either of the other groups, to a religious institute cannot be done without the

permission of the Holy See. The reason is because it entails a substantial change in the vows and in the way of life. Clearly, only the Holy See is above those different forms of consecrated life: religious institutes, secular institutes and society of apostolic life.

2. The Juridical Effects of the Transfer

What is the juridical status of a religious during the process of transfer concerning his/her rights and obligations? The normative says that "until the religious makes profession in the new institute, while the vows remain, the rights and obligations which the member had in the former institute are suspended; however, the religious is obligated to observe the proper law of the new institute from the beginning of the probationary period." And it adds: "By profession in the new institute the member is incorporated into it, while the preceding vows, rights and obligations cease" (can. 685).

Thus during the entire process of transfer the basic obligation to observe the vows remains. However, since during the probationary period the religious is no longer living fully the life of the original institute, the rights and obligations proper to that institute, e.g. active and passive voice in elections, are suspended. Moreover, from the beginning of probation, the member is bound to observe the laws of the new institute.

With the perpetual profession of the religious in the new institute, all ties with the original institute thereby cease. Thereafter the religious is bound by the proper laws of the new institute, and can exercise all the rights given to a perpetually professed member in that new institute.

What about *monetary considerations* during and after the transfer period? There is nothing stated regarding this matter in the case of transfer. Hence, we can say that the former institute

has the right to whatever it acquired by reason of the member's work or whatever was given to the member during the period of incorporation in the institute, according to the universal law and the proper law of the institute. In turn, the new institute would seem to have a right to some remuneration from the former institute for the "room and board" during the probationary period. In the case of a religious with a dowry, according to experts, the same should be given to the new institute at the time of the profession without the accrued interest.

A remaining puzzling question related to the issue is whether a perpetually professed religious can make a new profession or not. It has been said that at the end of the probationary period, the [perpetually professed] religious is admitted to perpetual profession in the new institute. The text says: "On completion of a probationary period of at least three years, *the member can be admitted to perpetual profession in the new institute*" (c. 684 § 1). From the theological point of view, it is difficult to understand how a religious can make a new profession. The reason is because religious profession is made to God and while it remains one cannot make a new profession, since the new one would become a sort of empty superstructure. An implicit answer or explanation given in the legislation is that the earlier vows "cease." In fact, the law of the Church states that "By profession in the new institute the member is incorporated into it *and the earlier vows, rights and obligations cease*" (can. 685). Well, that the earlier rights and obligations cease is quite logical, but not so seems to be the fact that the earlier vows "cease" since we know that perpetual vows only cease either by dispensation or by the death of the religious! To our mind, what ceases is not the vows but simply *the reference of the vows towards the original institute* and henceforth the main juridical effect of the new profession is the full incorporation of the religious into the new institute.

3. Summary

Answering briefly to the original questions, we say that it is indeed possible for a member of a religious institute to transfer from his/her Institute to another or from an Institute to a Society of Apostolic Life.

The *procedural steps* are typically three, namely:

(1) First, it is necessary to obtain the permission of the supreme Moderators of both institutes with the consent of their respective councils [or the consent of the entire community in the case of transfer from an autonomous Monastery to another, and permission from the Holy See in the case of transfer to a Secular Institute or Society of Apostolic Life];

(2) Second, the member shall complete a probationary period of at least three years in the new institute; and

(3) Third, on completion of the probationary period, if the religious is judged suitable, he/she is admitted to perpetual profession in the new institute, thus becoming a member of it with all rights and privileges. However, if the religious is not admitted or refuses to make profession in the new institute, he/she is to return immediately to the original institute, to which he/she still belongs.

Concerning the *juridical effects* of such transfer, the canonical rule is that "until the religious makes profession in the new institute, while the vows remain, the rights and obligations which the member had in the former institute are suspended; however, the religious is obligated to observe the proper law of the new institute from the beginning of the probationary period." Then "By profession in the new institute the member is incorporated into it, while the preceding vows, rights and obligations cease" (can. 685). No financial considerations are contemplated in the legal provisions for transfer; thus the general principles of universal law and the proper law of the institutes prevail on this matter.

Homilies for September-October 2002*

MARIO BALTAZAR, OP

September 1, 2002

Twenty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Jer 20:7-9/Rom 12:1-2/Mt 16:21-27)

Chapter 20 of today's first reading contains the strongest, most daring and unbelievable bill of complaints brought up by an individual against another that was ever recorded in the bible. It is the strongest because the individual did not mince his words to express his frustrations. It is the most daring because he did not bother to consider the consequences of his protest. Finally, it is unbelievable because it was a protest lodged by a creature against his creator!

Were you embarrassed and shocked at hearing this passage of chapter 20 from the Book of Jeremiah? A more timid publisher of his book would perhaps have suppressed chapter 20 to spare

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

us of embarrassment. But why was it preserved? And why does Mother Church present it for our reflection?

Listen again to Jeremiah's words, "Lord, you have deceived me, and I was deceived. You are stronger than I am, and you have overpowered me. Everyone makes fun of me, they laugh at me all day long. Lord, I am ridiculed and scorned all the time because I proclaim your message. But when I say I will forget the Lord and no longer speak in his name, then your message is like fire burning deep within me."

Poor Jeremiah, whether he proclaims or not the Lord's message he gets miserable. He is in a no-win situation. The concluding verse of chapter 20 is not reported in the first reading. Nor will I report them to you for fear you will find them more embarrassing and shocking to come from such a great and saintly prophet.

However, Jeremiah 20 should be read in the context of the two other readings of today's Mass, so that we can extract the divine meaning behind so many complexities, riddles and contradiction in the prophet's life and anybody else's life for that matter. For what happened to Jeremiah, could happen also to you and me. The feelings of frustration, helplessness and desperation that he experienced, could also become our own experience. We should welcome it if it takes place in our lifetime. It is a sure sign that God has accepted a Christian if she/he has undergone the experience of Jeremiah, has gone through this sort of baptism of fire.

Jeremiah was nicknamed derisively by his contemporaries as the "Terror Everywhere," because the messages he had to announce on God's part were about destruction, violence, terror and death due to the sins of Jeremiah's countrymen. Once, he had been chained and beaten for proclaiming God's message.

This is the risk nowadays for anyone who would make the defense and proclamation of God's message as his/her career. For people who would rather listen to things that tickle the ear and conform to their standards, a serious preacher risks becoming the butt of their jokes, the object of disdain and derision. This eventuality does not occur only to priests-and preachers but can also happen to ordinary Christians who are genuinely committed to live out the gospel.

Hence, we have the encouraging statement of Jesus in the third reading addressed to all Christians, "If anyone wants to be my disciple, he must forget himself, carry his cross, and follow me. For whoever wants to save his own life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

Therefore, the most sensible thing for a Christian to do is to welcome Paul's advice given in the second reading, "Offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God, dedicated to his service, and pleasing to him." It is never pleasant to be a victim for sacrifice. Nor dying on the cross was a pleasant thing to Jesus Christ when he offered himself as a sacrifice for our sakes. Yet Christ did what had to be done. So let us do what needs to be done.

September 8, 2002

Twenty-third Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Ez 33:7-9/Rom 13:8-10/Mt 18:15-20)

We have an important message to pick up from today's three bible readings. It has something to do with advising our erring brethren to desist from their wayward conduct and begin a straight life. It is never a pleasant task to correct someone. But we have many other duties which we cannot avoid doing that are not pleasant either. If we consider, however, the motives and reasons

laid down by the bible itself, the duty of giving friendly correction becomes lighter to carry out.

Firstly, though, do we want to know how God feels about those who stray from the right path? Matthew 18 gives us an insight to this by citing the context within which the gospel message of today is wrapped up. That context, which by the way is not included in today's gospel reading, is the parable of the lost sheep.

God really does not want any of his children to stray and get lost. He seeks out the sinner in order to bring him back to the fold. If he has 100 sheep peacefully grazing in his pasture land, and one gets lost, he will leave the 99 safe animals and starts on the difficult task of finding the lost sheep.

What is surprising, however, is that God wants to enlist our help in finding his lost sheep. Not that God is a poor searcher but so that in the process of helping in the search, we can discover and also find ourselves. To explain. We may feel reluctant to advise our fellowmen who stray from the right path. The correct words may refuse to come out of our lips due to embarrassment. This is quite a natural feeling. But we need to overcome this when it becomes our duty to call their attention. If the correct words do not come out easily from our mouths, we can substitute them with out correct actions.

How often have our evil actions induced our fellowmen to commit also evil actions! We do not even stop to think about it. So it is only fair that if we have been responsible for leading people to evil because of our mindless actions, we should make amends by leading people towards good through our exemplary actions.

This is one reason, why God calls us into partnership with him in the search for our straying brethren. We can never adopt

the reprehensible attitude of Cain. When asked by God of the whereabouts of his brother Abel, the murderer cynically replied, "How should I know? Am I my brother's keeper?"

Yes, of course. We are all our brother's keepers. We should keep one another from doing evil. We have the moral duty and the authority to correct our erring brethren, as can be deduced from today's third reading. Here, Jesus explains the procedure of fraternal correction. At the same time, he insinuates that whatever just actions we take in this matter will earn the support and confirmation of heaven. However, all should be done in an atmosphere of prayer and charity.

The first reading from Ezekiel 33 has ever harsher words for those who decline the duty of advising their erring brethren. It states that should a sinner, who otherwise could have been saved by a timely advice, end up losing his soul, he has nobody to blame but himself. However, God will hold accountable the one that failed to give the necessary advice.

Why do you think we preachers hammer continuously on the need for conversion, perhaps to the point we are sounding already like broken records? It is because we do not want to be held responsible for the loss of the souls of sinners. But the bottom line of Ezekiel 33, for all its harsh words, is the consoling truth that God does not want the eternal ruin of a single soul.

Finally, the second reading (Rom 13) gives a very convincing reason why we should cheerfully take up the unpleasant duty of correcting our erring brethren. At the same time, it points out the way we can make this duty possibly and eventually redundant and unnecessary. Paul says that if people practice love of neighbors as God wants it, then nobody will offend his fellowmen so there will be no transgressions to correct. Whether this is an impossible dream, a sinless society which needs no fraternal correction. But

following the apostle's advice would be the great first step towards its realization.

September 15, 2002

Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Sir 27:30-28:7/Rom 14:7-9/Mt 18:21-26)

Clearer than broad daylight is the message of today's bible readings. For us who pray daily the Our Father consciously and with understanding, there's no room for doubt concerning what God is telling us in today's scripture selections.

The message is: we must forgive from the heart our brethren for the many times they beg our forgiveness. The reason is: we also need forgiveness from God who declared he will treat us in the same manner we treat our erring brethren. The rationale behind God's policy is: our brethren's offenses are insignificant compared to the offenses we commit against God. So, if we need and expect God's pardon, we should be willing and ready to grant pardon to our brethren.

Hence, the familiar prayer in the Our Father: "Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." This Christian attitude of forgiveness has its roots, indeed, in the prayer Jesus taught us to pray and in the stern parable of the "Unforgiving Servant" in today's second reading, Mt 18.

But mankind did not have to wait for Jesus to teach it how and why men should forgive their offending fellowmen. We find this teaching already in the Old Testament, in the book of Sirach 27, the first reading in today's Mass. He says in effect, that you cannot expect the Lord to pardon you while you are holding a grudge against someone else. You yourself are a sinner, and if you won't forgive the other who offended you, you have no right to pray that the Lord forgive your sins.

I guess there's no need to discuss this teaching any further. It is so clear. But this question may be raised: is this teaching relevant to the actual life of the *Pinoys* and *Pinays*, who as a people are generally peace-loving and law-abiding, who value greatly the traits of "*pakikisama*", "*pagmamalasakit*", "*paggalang*" and so on?

Filipinos generally are peace-loving and are not given to committing offenses that deserve prison terms. But quarrels exist between neighbors, between brothers and sisters; between parents-in-laws and children-in-laws; between uncles and aunts and nephews or nieces.

It is also true that most *Pinoys* and *Pinays* are willing and ready to forgive. In fact, foreigners do not understand us as a people whom they fault with being too ready to forgive and forget national humiliations inflicted upon us, thus paving the way to more of the same kind of humiliation.

But what is perceive as a problem is not so much that we are too ready to forgive offenses done to us but that those who offend do not even think of asking for forgiveness. This is a serious problem because if allowed to go on, then little by little, we build a personality that will respect no law, no property rights, no civilized conduct.

Furthermore, there exist offenses we commit against ourselves such as abuse of health, abuse of drugs, abuse of time, abuse of physical integrity, or non-use of our potentials. Have we ever stopped to ask forgiveness from ourselves? It sounds silly, but these are offenses crying for reparation.

This problem becomes more serious on the theological level, i.e. when habitually we do not ask God to pardon the offenses we commit against him. Of course, we pray the Our Father often wherein we say, "Forgive us our sins," but how serious is this

petition on our lips. The "Unforgiving Servant" of today's parable also begged forgiveness from his king. But this was out of fear of the prison. He really was not sorry for having cheated his king of billions of pesos. Proof of this was as soon as he got the king's pardon, he went after his fellow servant who owed him a few pesos and chased him all the way to prison.

To acknowledge one's sinfulness and constant need to divine pardon is, I think, the most human and most Christian attitude a man can take before God. This would make it easy for him to forgive in turn his offending fellowmen. Paul wrote in today's second reading, "None of us lives for himself alone; none of us dies for himself only." This is very true. One does not live for oneself alone that one does not have to pardon or ask pardon from others. And what is much more, one does not die for oneself alone that one feels no need to forgive or ask forgiveness from others

It is said that St. Dominic who had never committed a serious offense in his life, then called his Dominican brethren to gather around him at the point of death. The first thing that came out from his lips was to ask forgiveness for all his shortcomings in their regard. In the ritual for the dying, proper to the Dominicans, it is provided that when the brethren had gathered around the friar to sing the Hail Holy Queen, he is urged to ask forgiveness for all offenses done to his community. St. Dominic also fulfilled what Paul wrote further down in today's passage, "If we live, it is for the Lord we live, and if we die, it is for the Lord we die. So whether we live or die, we belong to Jesus Christ our Lord." Somewhere in John's gospel, Jesus himself said, "All men will know that you belong to me if you love one another and forgive from the heart." (Cfr Jn 13:15)

September 22, 2002

Twenty-fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A

(Readings: Is 55:6-9/Phil 1:20-24.27/Mt 20:1-6)

Among the verses appearing in the three bible readings today, this one keeps on ringing in the ears of my head and spirit, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, and my ways are different from yours" (Isaiah 55). Aside from its tenacious ring, this verse, in my opinion, sums up the common message of the three bible readings for us to carry home.

How often have we stopped to think that God's thoughts may really just be different from ours? If we seldom do so, or never, maybe it is because we take for granted that God thinks just like we do and approves of all our plans and actions as we think them out.

It is timely, therefore, that we all be reminded as if by the pealing of a bell (like it does to me) that God had said in the first reading, "My thoughts are not like your thoughts, and my ways are different from your ways." Actually, this reminder from God has a dual purpose: to pull us down to earth when our thoughts carry us to unrealistic heights; and, inversely, to pick us up from the ground when despairing thoughts clip off our wings and transform us into crawling insects.

For that is where our thoughts can get us to at times: now enthusiastic, exaggerated, self-confident or, contrarily, now pessimistic, fearful, desperate and beaten. Even when we try to keep on the middle of the road, we cannot shake off entirely the doubt and the fear about having included mistakes in our choices.

I cannot refrain from squirming when I see or hear people, discussing with such self-assurance and authoritative air matters

like whether or not to end a marriage, when and how to prevent or terminate a pregnancy, what direction should sexual life take, what economic model should a populace be prevailed upon to adopt, and so on. I say to myself, "Their thoughts, no matter how professional or scientific they claim them to be, are just men's thoughts. Why don't they find out also God's thoughts, who has also a preponderant say in these matters?"

I grant that many may have good intentions in the plans and projects they have thought out. Simon Peter was also a well-meaning man when he remonstrated with Jesus, because the latter had predicted a shameful death for himself at the hands of civil and religious authorities. "God forbid," Peter intoned with self-assurance, "This should never happen to you."

But what did Jesus reply? "Get behind me, Satan, because your thoughts do not come from God but from man." Jesus called Peter, Satan, because he was an obstacle on his way: Yet Peter thought he was doing Jesus a favor. In fact, he was doing his Master a disfavor by serving him man's thoughts and man's ways on a silver platter.

In the first reading (Is 55), God grounds his appeal for us to convert to him, on the basis that his thoughts are not like our thoughts. Meaning to say, in our thinking, we might come to the conclusion that we are "kaput", finished, complete failures, incorrigible sinners. But in the thinking of God, if we allow him to have his way with us, we still are a marketable product, a potential success, saints-in-the-making, and children of God.

Similarly, the third reading (Mat 20), shows how man's thoughts are unimaginatively boring though mathematically measured. For so many hours of works, so many pesos in compensation. But God does not want to be bound by mathematics. He rewards those who work for one hour only just as much as those

who work for eight hours. Man may grumble at this. But why should he? Are not God's thoughts and ways different from men's?

But do not get Him mistaken. God does not favor laziness or discriminate against hard work. God is just telling us it is never too late to change our lives and to return to him. His door is always open to receive us, whether we knock at it early in our life or late in the years.

Finally, our work-contract with God does not have an expiration date. God's ways are different from man's ways. There is no such thing as vacation time from our assigned work by God as long as we stay alive on this earth. In the second reading (Philippians 1), Paul stated that if he had his way, he would prefer the early sleep of death and be with Christ to staying alive and continue serving his fellow-Christians. In fact, however, he admitted not knowing which to choose between the two. God showed him what His own thoughts were. And Paul agreed. He aligned his thoughts with those of God. He would continue serving his fellowmen for as long as God keeps him alive on this earth, even if that meant postponing his rendezvous with Christ in heaven.

September 29, 2002

Twenty-sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Ez 18:25-28/Phil 2:1-11/Mt 21:28-32)

There is no need of citing many reasons to show you that the three bible readings of today carry a common message on the merits and necessity of obedience to God.

Obedience is an endangered species. It is in danger of disappearing from our planet, given the low esteem if not outright contempt accorded to it, due to a widespread false idea of human freedom, human autonomy and human dignity.

When obedience to God is undermined, it will not take much time for obedience to lesser authorities also to suffer. If you analyze it carefully, the worrisome upheavals we are witnessing around the world, including our own country, are due essentially to the fact that men have been refusing to obey God.

But obedience, whether to God or to lesser legitimate authority, is one of the pillars of a well ordered, stable and rational society. It cannot be allowed to disappear in part or in whole, without inviting in its place chaos, violence and mayhem. Hence, society has good reasons for using sanctions, including very stern ones; to ensure that obedience to its laws is carefully safeguarded and dutifully followed.

To be sure, God does not feel threatened by disobedience. But he defends his honor. To exact obedience from his creatures, he uses however, moral persuasion, i.e. a system of rewards and punishments, a package of appeals and warnings. Thus, the three bible readings serve to emphasize the value and necessity of obedience to God principally and to legitimate superiors subsequently, like our parents, teachers, guardians, civil and church authorities.

Mt 21 (third reading) shows how obedience to God is not complied with, if word is not accompanied by action. Your "yes" to God is a sham if not followed by deeds. In fact, your positive action suffices even if you did not pronounce your "yes", more even, your positive action can make up for your earlier "no".

Thus, the conclusion that Jesus draws from the parable of the two sons is limpid and logical. The repentant prostitutes and the cheating tax collectors are getting into the kingdom of heaven ahead of the self-righteous Pharisees. For obedience or disobedience to God has its due reward or punishment.

Phil 2 (second reading) presents Jesus to us as the model of obedience. There are various reasons, according to Paul, why we find it difficult to obey God or legitimate superiors, like selfish ambitions, cheap desire to boast, exaggerated self-importance, and self-centeredness. Jesus could have claimed for himself the privileges and rights of one who has the nature of God. Instead, of his own free will, he gave up all those and took the nature of a servant. Becoming man, he walked the path of obedience all the way to death - a death on the cross.

Finally, Ezekiel 18 (first reading) shows God as a good educator, training by degrees his people on how to obey. He lays down a new set of principles for moral life to replace the one of former times. Whereas formerly, God warned he would punish transgressions of parents down to their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren; from now on, each individual will answer for his own wrongdoing. Whether or not God actually went after the sinner down to his fourth generation (we do not exactly know) it was to instill fear in the heart of the would-be sinner and to expose the great evil that disobedience really was.

In view of all the above, we can aptly repeat the prophet Daniel's words in the entrance antiphon of today's Mass: "O Lord, we have sinned against you and disobeyed your will. But now show us your greatness of heart, and treat us with your unbounded kindness."

October 6, 2002

Twenty-seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Is 5:1-7, Phil 4:6-9/Mt 21:33-43)

In assigning the foregoing three bible readings for today's Mass, Mother Church treats us to doctrine and varieties. The varieties serve to clothe the doctrine to make it interesting and

appealing to us. The doctrine in turn gives substance to the varieties. Briefly, we have before us a song, a parable, and an exhortation. The song comes from Isaiah 5 (first reading) and is titled, "The Song of the Vineyard." The parable is reported in Matthew 21 (third reading) and has for title, "The Parable of the Tenants in the Vineyard." The exhortation is recorded in Philippians 4 (second reading) and can be coded "Counsel on Peace."

Thus, the aforementioned literary variations rivet our attention to the doctrine they enrobe even as they move it forward, develop it, make it gather steam and power along the three-stage route of song, parable, and exhortation.

Let us consider first the Song of the Vineyard. It is quite possible that Isaiah, the composer of the song, may have sung it or told others to sing it for his countrymen to hear, in accord with popular customs during planting and harvesting season. Do we not have our own song "Planting Rice is Never Fun" which, despite its title, is sung in a happy and vigorous tune?

So is Isaiah 5 and his song. It starts allegro, expressing the happy mood of Isaiah's friend as he prepares with vigor and great expectation all and everything needed for his vines to produce the best grapes in the world. But the song winds up *rallentando*, as the friend discovers in frustration that his vines produced nothing but sour grapes. Finally, the song finishes tremolo, as the vine owner unleashes his anger over his vineyard threatening to destroy it.

Isaiah's countrymen must have been jolted and dumbstruck when it was explained to them, after the song was over, that the friend and the vine-owner was no other than God himself, and that they were those vines. God expected them to do what is good, but they bore injustices and murder.

Matthew 21 deals also on a vineyard that stood again for the Judeans or the Jews. But the parable moves the theme of the vineyard a step forward in that the victims of their injustices and murder included the only son and heir of the vine-owner. The chief priests and Pharisees who listened to the parable understood that Jesus was talking about them. They wanted to arrest him then and there, but they feared the crowd because it still favored Jesus.

Thanks to the song and parable, the doctrine that Mother Church wants to impart should be clear by now. God withdraws his favor from anyone who abuses his love and kindness notwithstanding pre-existing ties and privileges.

Israel was the most favored nation on earth. It enjoyed a status and treatment never before granted by God to any other nation, people, or race. However, it exaggerated its own worth and relied on those titles to oppress and murder their fellowmen. Hence, God rejected them, not completely for he preserved a remnant from which he brought forth a new people, a new Israel. These are the Christians.

Are the Christians, the new people of God, the new Israel, forever secure in their possession and enjoyment of the privileges and favors formerly granted to Israel but now transferred to them? It depends. The doctrine of the song of Isaiah and the parable of Jesus remains unchanged. Our privileges carry with them corresponding responsibilities. A Latin adage expresses this neatly, "*Nullus honor sine onere.*" There is no honor without its burden of responsibility.

Should we be overly worried on this account? Philippians 4 (second reading) teaches us the secret of how to enjoy our privileges and retain God's favors for keeps. Paul writes thus, "Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for

what you need... Fill your minds, instead, with those things that are good and deserve praise: things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and honorable... And God's peace will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus."

October 13, 2002

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Is 25:6-10/Phil 4:12-14. 19-20/Mt 22:1-4)

Last Sunday we heard about vineyards. This was the literary image the three bible readings then employed to impart God's teaching about favors he dispenses to men. Today, we hear about banquets. This again is the literary image the three bible readings now use to impart God's teaching about his universal offer of total happiness to mankind.

That God employs the literary images of vineyards and banquets to drive home his teachings on one and the other points mentioned above, shows how well he understands human psychology and the processes of human communication.

The themes of vineyards and banquets strike responsive chords in the human heart and evoke strong feelings and powerful emotions. Vineyards, for example, inasmuch as they constitute a vital source of livelihood for many countries, including Israel to whom Isaiah addressed himself, conjure powerful emotions by their mere mention. We can make pretty much the same remark regarding banquets as these are convenient means for human relations and companionship.

Thus, Isaiah 25 (first reading) and Matthew 22 (third reading) bring to the fore the symbol and image of banquets in order to impart a central teaching on God's final plan for us. While both authors employ the same symbol of a banquet, yet in their

presentation there exist differences of treatment and detail, which merit our full attention.

Let us consider, first, Matthew 22. Here Jesus likens the kingdom of heaven to a banquet that a certain king prepared for his guests on the occasion of his son's wedding. In itself, a banquet is a come-on proposition. One does not need much convincing to accept an invitation to it, considering the prospect of good food, good drinks, and good conversation.

Now, what can one say about a royal banquet, one that a king himself plans and serves out? It boggles the mind and stupefies the spirit to hear that his guests snobbed his invitation in favor of trivial occupations and went to the extent of murdering his emissaries.

Receiving their due punishment, the unworthy guests were substituted at short notice by all sorts of people, from the elite to the common ranks, from persons who were somebodies to individuals of little or no account. In brief, the banquet hall was filled to capacity by this eleventh-hour motley crowd. All were able to enjoy the affair, except for one who was discovered not wearing the prescribed attire and, accordingly, was thrown out of the hall.

The details Jesus marked out in this dramatic parable serve to emphasize, on the one hand, God's universal offer of definitive and total happiness to mankind and, on the other hand, men's awkward, fumbling, or errant response at best and perverted, insensate, or criminal at worst.

Isaiah 25, in his turn, describes also a banquet but without the contrarities we saw in Matthew 22. The richest food and the finest wine will be served not only for a chosen few but for all the nations of the world. No cloud of sorrow will threaten the guests; every tear will be wiped away from their eyes; every

stain of disgrace will be removed; and death itself will be destroyed. There is no doubt that Isaiah's presentation of such a banquet symbolize the total happiness of heaven that will be the fortune of those for whom it has been prepared.

Paul is among the invited guests to this heavenly banquet. He is aware and sure of his place in the banquet hall of heaven. On the basis of such assurance, he confides in Phil. 4 (second reading) that through Jesus Christ he has found strength to face all conditions, favorable or unfavorable, and experienced contentment in all circumstances, good or bad. He prays and wishes that this state and attitude of mind and heart are shared by his fellow-believers.

October 20, 2002

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Is 45:1,4-6/1Thess 1:1-5/Mt 22:15-21)

Geography and history were never my favorite subjects when I was in the grade or high school. Perhaps it was because of the way they were taught to us then: memorizing names, dates and places. Did you have this kind of experience in your early years? But over time, I came to realize they were important subjects for they deal about real peoples and not only names, real-life events and not only dates, real countries and nations with distinctive customs, ideas, dreams and ambitions.

In the bible, we are constantly reminded of geography and history. They have a special interest for the believer, not of course for their own sake, but because God is seen through them as the sovereign Lord and Master who gently, almost imperceptibly, but also formally and unerringly guides all peoples and individuals, all events and happenings, all upheavals and cataclysms to serve His hidden purpose.

Thus, by means of the majestic cadences of today's first reading (Isaiah 45), God announces the coming restoration of his people Israel, through the hands of the pagan King Cyrus of Persia. It is this same God who punished the sins of his people before, by allowing the pagan and fierce King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylonia to carry them off to captivity.

Reflecting on the vicissitudes of their history and geography, the ancient people of Israel came to form ideas about their worth and destiny. Some entertained the erroneous idea of racial superiority and fierce independence; others maintained, also erroneously, that their nation's survival and security depended on reliance upon more powerful, albeit, pagan countries. The balanced and orthodox idea should have been that Israel's salvation depended alone in God who uses peoples, individuals, nations (whatever their religious affiliations) for his own loving and wise purposes.

These strands of ideas persisted up to Jesus' times. The Pharisees, exponents of fierce independence for Israel, banded with the Herodians, proponents in turn of subservience to superpower nations. They banded together to trap Jesus by means of a tricky question: "Is it lawful for our people to pay taxes to foreign masters, for instance, the Roman Emperor?"

This is the plot of today's gospel story (Mt 22). We know Jesus' famous reply, "Give to the emperor the things of the emperor, give to God the things of God." Who can quarrel with such a stand? Even the Pharisees and Herodians reluctantly conceded the correctness of Jesus' answer. It neither favored the ideological platform of the Pharisees nor that of the Herodians. If Jesus had sided with either of the two ideologies, he would have gravely compromised himself. That precisely was the trap his enemies intended for him.

Time and again, the individual Christian is tested by a perennial problem: whose side must he take, state or church, the emperor or God, earth or heaven, technology and science or faith and prayer. People can manipulate things to push the Christian into making a choice "either, or," as if there were a necessary opposition between the two horns of what otherwise, is a false dilemma. The first reading (Is 45) showed that the temporal and spiritual spheres do not necessarily cancel each other out. On the contrary, there could be cooperation, coordination, and convergence between the two.

A word of caution, however, is in order. In my observation, many Christians are giving more attention to the temporal sphere to the neglect of the spiritual. Many are giving more attention to Cesar than to God.

Hopefully the words of Paul in today's second reading can fully apply. He says in effect, "We remember before our God and Father how you put your faith into practice, how your love made you work so hard, and how your hope in Jesus Christ is firm. You became an example to all believers. For the news about your faith in God has gone out everywhere. All those people speak about how you serve the true and living God." My prayer is that you give to God what belongs to God, just as you are giving to the state what belongs to the state.

October 27, 2002

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle A

(Readings: Ex 22:2f>26/Thess 1:5-10/Mt 22:34-40)

Today's gospel story says, the Pharisees asked Jesus which is the greatest commandment of the law i.e. among the Old Testament precepts. They asked this, not because they wanted to observe it, but in order to test Jesus. Last Sunday, the gospel

story narrated how they wanted to trap Jesus on the matter of paying taxes to Caesar.

Throughout his so-called public life, that lasted three years, Jesus was hounded by this group of people who sought every means and occasion to trap or trip him. They were more tenacious in their evil purpose than the devil himself, who tested Jesus in the desert, for only a couple of hours or less.

There are 613 precepts or commandments in the Old Testament. So the chances of error are stacked up against anyone who would attempt to single out which of them is the greatest, so it seemed to the Pharisees when they questioned Jesus about this. It occurs to us that the Pharisees, aside from being hypocritical in this instance, did not really know which one was the greatest. Surrounded with so many precepts, who really can know? Unfortunately, that question could lead to this other one: who cares? It is a disguised statement of alienation, disinterest and budding rebellion.

Man finds himself in this predicament while he exists in this world. He literally is engulfed in an ocean of rules and regulations, laws and prescriptions, precepts and prohibitions. The more advanced the society he lives in, the bigger and deeper becomes this ocean of legislations.

If you are a Filipino citizen, you are bounded, not only by a thick-paged Constitution but also by several codes of laws, and to boot, by thousands of laws from Congress, in the past, present and future. Hence the sobriquet attached to it as the legislative mill, like a rice mill that keeps on churning its product. Then there are the ordinances from the executive branch at all levels, national, regional, provincial, municipal, barangay.

Similarly, if you are a Christian you are bound by ecclesiastical laws. In the recent past the Code of Canon Law had 2414

rules. The present Code has 1752, still numerous by that count, are they not? Other rulers are issued by different departments of the Church, not to mention those given by bishops, parish priests, religious superiors, etc.

Laws, whether civil or church, are necessary for man. Their absence would make life in society or community impossible. Too many laws could also make social life unbearable. I know of a village ordinance that prescribes, under penalty of hefty fine, the color of your window curtains. It is just that tendency, ever present, to regulate the details of your life.

As long as we are here on earth, laws are inescapable realities. If you ask me why, it is because we have not yet attained our final end. Laws are meant for that, to lead us to our final goal. That is why in heaven, laws do not exist; they are not necessary. If any or ever, only the law of love exists there. But this is not even a law. One is not and cannot be forced to love. In heaven, as well as elsewhere here on earth, love is spontaneous and free.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Jesus says that the greatest thing is to love the Lord, your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. After all, that will be our perpetual activity in heaven.

If the first reading (Exodus 22) singles out the commandments of good treatment for widows and orphans, of dealing kindly with the poor who are forced to borrow money, it is because if you do not do so, you are not loving God with all your heart, mind and soul.

Also the second reading (Thess 1) is informative and relevant to our reflections. Paul says there that, despite the hardships and sufferings the Christians of Thessalonica were enduring, still they could afford to smile! How? Why? Because the Holy Spirit, the God of love, was with them, remains with them.

In fine, Jesus needs to remind us also of the primacy of the commandment of love, because the myriads of laws that govern our lives tend to obscure from our sight that commandment which really matters, and which we might be tempted to bury in forgetfulness, in distractions or through sheer glut and nausea. To fulfill the greatest commandment and to carry cheerfully the load of other necessary laws and precepts, let us pray to the Holy Spirit for strength, perseverance and joy.