

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

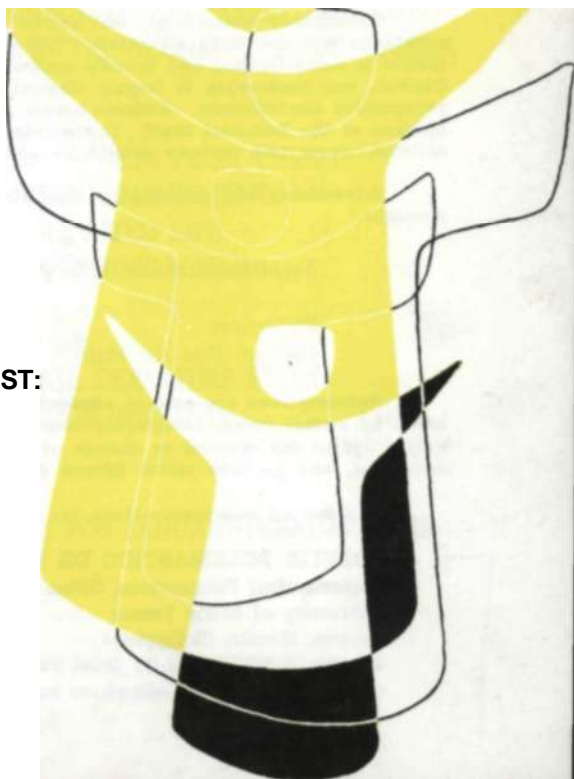
THE OFFICIAL INTERDIOCESAN BULLETIN

Vol. LXXVIII, No. «??»

November-December 2002

(Special Issue

**STARTING AFRESH FROM CHRIST:
A RENEWED COMMITMENT
TO CONSECRATED LIFE
IN THE THIRD MILLENNIUM**



BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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

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

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

Subscription Rates (Effective January 2002)

	One Year	Per Copy
Philippines	P600.00	P100.00
Foreign: (Via Air Mail)	US\$ 50.00	\$15.00

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

Address all communications to:

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

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Espana, Manila, Philippines

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EDITORIAL

Beyond the School Walls

VICENTE CAJILIG, OP

Attempts to bring together educators in Asia Pacific have been done by certain groups. Activities have been devised to facilitate meetings, dialogues and celebration. One of these groups is ASEACCU (Association of Southeast and East Asian Catholic Colleges and Universities).

Last August 2-4, 2002 over 120 delegates attended the 10th ASEACCU conference. Nine countries represented this conference namely Australia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand and USA. The venue was University of Notre Dame Australia, Fremantle, Perth, Western Australia.

Prof. Carolyn Woo (Dean of Business, The University of Notre Dame Indiana, USA), Fr. Ben Nebres, SJ (President, Ateneo de Manila, Philippines) and Prof. Peter Harney (Director, Edmund Rice Center, The University of Notre Dame Australia) were the three outstanding speakers who developed the theme *"Renewing our commitment to the mission of Catholic universities through academic, administrative and student reform"*.

The objectives of the conference were: (1) To facilitate fellowship and relationship between Catholic universities in the region; (2) To provide an opportunity for consideration of specific issues and problems which confront Catholic universities in the region; (3) To enable Catholic university leaders to familiarize themselves with the traditions, contemporary conditions and future directions of the Church and Catholic education in Australia; and (4) To enable Catholic university leaders to gain a first-hand experience of Australian life.

The general points taken in the seminar were: (1) Schools need to be action-oriented to complement the highly academic endeavors; (2) The task of the future is not so much to articulate problem but to emphasize what course of action be done; (3) The movement of ASEACCU should proceed from simply a group for communication to action-oriented group; (4) The "how" of responding to the challenges facing academies is at stake. The schools should look for the details of the "how". Workshops could be designed to discover the "how".

Catholic universities, colleges, and schools then are challenged to go beyond the boundaries of their environment and walls. The participants are encouraged to reach out to sectors of society most in need of assistance.

Migration and Inter-Religious Dialogue*

JOHN PAUL II

1. In the course of these last decades, humanity has more and more taken on the features of a large village, where distances have become shorter and the network of communications more compact. The development of modern means of transportation makes it easier for people to move from one country to another, from one continent to another. Among the consequences of this significant social phenomenon is the presence of about a hundred and fifty million immigrants spread all over the different parts of the world. This fact obliges society and the Christian community to reflect in order to be able to adequately respond to these emerging challenges, at the beginning of the new millennium, in a world where men and women of different cultures and religions are called to live shoulder to shoulder with one another.

For this living together to develop peacefully, it is indispensable to remove the barriers of diffidence, prejudice and fear that unfortunately still exist among those who belong to the different

* Message of the Holy Father for the 88th World Day of Migration 2002.

religions. In every country, dialogue and mutual tolerance are required among those who profess the religion of the majority and those who belong to minorities, often made up of immigrants, who are followers of various religions. Dialogue is the leading way to follow, and the Church invites us to walk this path in order to move from diffidence to respect, from rejection to welcome.

Recently, at the end of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, I wanted to renew an appeal in that direction, so that "a relationship of openness and dialogue with the followers of other religions" would come about (*Novo millennio ineunte*, 55). To reach this goal, initiatives that attract the attention of the major means of social communications are not enough. What are needed are rather everyday gestures, done with simplicity and constancy, that are capable of producing an authentic change in interpersonal relationships.

2. The vast and intense intertwining of migratory phenomena, which characterizes our times, multiplies the opportunities for inter-religious dialogue. Countries with ancient Christian roots as well as multicultural societies offer concrete opportunities for inter-religious exchange. In the European continent, marked by a long Christian tradition, citizens arrive who profess other beliefs. North America, a land that is already living a solid multicultural experience, hosts followers of the new religious movements. In India, where Hinduism prevails, there are Catholic religious men and women who render humble and useful service to the poorest in the country.

Dialogue is not always easy. For Christians, however, the patient and confident pursuit of it is a commitment to be constantly carried out. Counting on the grace of the Lord who enlightens minds and hearts, they remain open and welcoming towards those who profess other religions. Without ceasing to practice their own

faith with conviction, they also pursue dialogue with those who are not Christians. They are always well aware that to be able to authentically dialogue with others, a clear witness of their own faith is indispensable.

This sincere effort to dialogue presupposes, on one hand, the reciprocal acceptance of differences, and sometimes even of contradictions, and also a respect for the free decisions that people make according to their own conscience. It is therefore indispensable for each one, to whatever religion he may belong, to take into account the essential requirements of freedom of religion and of conscience, as stated so well by the Ecumenical Council Vatican II (cfr. *Dignitatis humanae*, 2).

I would like to express the wish that this kind of living together in solidarity may also take place in countries where the majority profess a religion different from Christianity, but where Christian immigrants live and where they unfortunately do not always enjoy a true freedom of religion and conscience.

If, in the world of human mobility, everyone would be animated by this spirit, almost as in a forge, there will arise providential possibilities of a fruitful dialogue wherein the centrality of the person will never be denied. This is the only way to nourish the hope "for warding off the dread spectre of those wars of religion which have so often bloodied human history" and which have often forced many people to abandon their own countries. It is urgent to work so that the name of the one and only God may become what it is, ever more "a name of peace and a summons to peace" (cfr. *Novo millennio ineunte*, 55).

3. "*Migration and inter-religious dialogue*": this is the theme proposed for the World Day of Migrants and Refugees of 2002. I pray the Lord that this annual celebration may offer all Christians the opportunity to go deeper into these all so actual aspects of

the new evangelization. May they value every instrument at their disposal, so that in parish communities, appropriate apostolic and pastoral initiatives could be set up.

The parish represents the space in which a true pedagogy of meeting with people of various religious convictions and cultures can be realized. In its various expressions, the parish community can become a training ground of hospitality, a place where an exchange of experiences and gifts takes place. This cannot but foster a tranquil life together, preventing the risk of tension with immigrants who bring other religious beliefs with themselves.

If there is a common will to dialogue in spite of being different, it is possible to find a ground of profitable exchange and develop a beneficial and mutual friendship that can also be translated into an effective collaboration towards common objectives in the service of common good. This is a providential opportunity, especially for metropolitan areas where there are very large numbers of immigrants belonging to different cultures and religions. In this regard, it would be possible to speak of true "laboratories" of respectful living together and constructive dialogue. Allowing himself to be guided by his love for his Divine Teacher, who redeemed all men through his death on the cross, the Christian also opens his arms and heart to everyone. It is the culture of respect and solidarity that must penetrate his spirit, especially when he is in multicultural and multi-religious environments.

4. Everyday, in many parts of the world, migrants, refugees and displaced people turn to Catholic organizations and parishes in search of support, and they are welcomed irrespective of cultural or religious affiliation. The service of charity, which Christians are always called to carry out, cannot be limited to the mere distribution of humanitarian aid. In this way, new pastoral situ-

ations arise, which the Church community cannot fail to take into consideration. It is the task of its members to look for appropriate occasions to share with those who are welcomed the gift of the revelation of God who is Love, who "so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son" (Jn 3:16). With the gift of material bread, it is indispensable not to neglect to offer the gift of faith, especially through one's own existential witness and always with great respect for all. Welcome and mutual openness allow people to know each other better and to discover that the various religious traditions not rarely contain precious seeds of truth. The dialogue that results from this can enrich every spirit that is open to the Truth and the Good.

In this way, if inter-religious dialogue is one of the most significant challenges of our times, the phenomenon of migration could foster its development. Obviously, such dialogue, as I wrote in my apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*, cannot "be based on religious indifferentism (no. 56). As a matter of fact, we Christians "are in duty bound, while engaging in dialogue, to bear clear witness to the hope that is within us" (*ibid.*). Dialogue must not hide, but exalt, the gift of faith. On the other hand, how can we keep such richness only for ourselves? How can we fail to offer the greatest treasure that we possess to migrants and foreigners who profess various religions and whom Providence places along our path, and do it with a great attention for the others' sensitivity?

To accomplish this mission it is necessary to let the Holy Spirit guide us. On the day of Pentecost, it was the Spirit of Truth who completed the divine design of the unity of mankind in the diversity of cultures and religions. On hearing the Apostles, the numerous pilgrims gathered together in Jerusalem exclaimed with wonder: "Each of us hears them speaking in his own tongue about the marvels God has accomplished" (Acts 2:11). Since that day,

the Church continues to carry out her mission, proclaiming the "marvels" that God does not cease to accomplish among those who belong to different races, peoples and nations.

5. To Mary, Mother of Jesus and of all humanity, I entrust the joys and the efforts of all those who sincerely pursue the way of dialogue among different religions and cultures, so that she may gather the people involved in the vast phenomenon of migration under her loving mantle. May Mary, the "Silence" in which the "Word" became flesh, the humble "handmaid of the Lord" who knew the tribulations of migration and the trials of solitude and abandonment, teach us to give witness to the Word who became Life among us and for us. May She render us ready for a frank and fraternal dialogue with all our migrant brothers and sisters, even if they belong to different religions.

I accompany these wishes with the assurance of my prayerful remembrance, and I bless you all with affection.

From Castelgandolfo, 25 July 2001

Canonization of **Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin***

JOHN PAUL II

1. *"I thank you, Father ... that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was your gracious will" (Mt 11:25-26).*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

These words of Jesus in today's Gospel are a special invitation to us to praise and thank God for the gift of the first indigenous Saint of the American Continent.

With deep joy I have come on pilgrimage to this Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Marian heart of Mexico and of America, to proclaim the holiness of Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin,¹ the simple, humble Indian who contemplated the sweet and serene face of Our Lady of Tepeyac, so dear to the people of Mexico.

* Homily of the Holy Father during his Apostolic visit to Mexico City, July 31, 2002.

¹ **St Juan Diego Cuauhtlatoatzin** (1474-1548). Little is known about the life of Juan Diego before his conversion, but tradition and archaeological and iconographical sources, along with the most important and oldest indigenous document on the

2. I am grateful for the kind words of Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, Archbishop of Mexico City, and for the warm hospitality of the people of this Primatial Archdiocese: my cordial greeting goes to everyone. I also greet with affection Cardinal Ernesto Corripio Ahumada, Archbishop Emeritus of Mexico City, and the other Cardinals, as well as the Bishops of Mexico, of America, of the Philippines and of other places in the world. I am likewise particularly grateful to the President and the civil Authorities for their presence at this celebration.

Today I address a very affectionate greeting to the many indigenous people who have come from the different regions of the country, representing the various ethnic groups and cultures which make up the rich, multifaceted Mexican reality. The Pope expresses his closeness to them, his deep respect and admiration, and receives them fraternally in the Lord's name.

3. What was Juan Diego like? Why did God look upon him? The Book of Sirach, as we have heard, teaches us that God alone *"is mighty; he is glorified by the humble"* (cf. *Sir* 3:20). Saint Paul's words, also proclaimed at this celebration, shed light on the divine way of bringing about salvation: *"God chose what is low and despised in the world ...so that no human being might boast in the presence of God"* (1 *Cor* 1:28,29).

It is moving to read the accounts of Guadalupe, sensitively written and steeped in tenderness. In them the Virgin Mary, the handmaid *"who glorified the Lord"* (*Lk* 1:46), reveals herself to Juan Diego as the Mother of the true God. As a sign, she gives him precious roses, and as he shows them to the Bishop, he discovers the blessed image of Our Lady imprinted on his tilma.

event of Guadalupe, *"El Nican Mopohua"* (written in NaTiatl with Latin characters, 1556, by the Indigenous writer Antonio Valeriano), give some information on the life of the saint and the apparitions.

"The Guadalupe Event", as the Mexican Episcopate has pointed out, "meant the beginning of evangelization with a vitality that surpassed all expectations. Christ's message, through his Mother, took up the central elements of the indigenous culture, purified them and gave them the definitive sense of salvation" (14 May 2002, No. 8). Consequently Guadalupe and Juan Diego have a deep ecclesial and missionary meaning and are a model of perfectly inculturated evangelization.

4. *"The Lord looks down from heaven, he sees all the sons of men"* (Ps 33:13), we recited with the Psalmist, once again confessing our faith in God, who makes no distinctions of race or culture. In accepting the Christian message without foregoing his indigenous identity, Juan Diego discovered the profound truth of the new humanity, in which all are called to be children of God. Thus he facilitated the fruitful meeting of two worlds and became the catalyst for the new Mexican identity, closely united to Our Lady of Guadalupe, whose mestizo face expresses her spiritual motherhood which embraces all Mexicans. This is why the witness of his life must continue to be the inspiration for the building up of the Mexican nation, encouraging brotherhood among all its children and ever helping to reconcile Mexico with its origins, values and traditions.

The noble task of building a better Mexico, with greater justice and solidarity, demands the cooperation of all. In particular, it is necessary today to support the indigenous peoples in their legitimate aspirations, respecting and defending the authentic values of each ethnic group. Mexico needs its indigenous peoples and these peoples need Mexico!

Juan Diego was born in 1474 with the name "Cuauhtlatotzin" ("the talking eagle") in Cuautlitlan, today part of Mexico City, Mexico. He was a gifted member of the Chichimeca people, one of the more culturally advanced groups living in the Anaihuac Valley.

Beloved brothers and sisters of every ethnic background of Mexico and America, today, in praising the Indian Juan Diego, I want to express to all of you the closeness of the Church and the Pope, embracing you with love and encouraging you to overcome with hope the difficult times you are going through.

5. At this decisive moment in Mexico's history, having already crossed the threshold of the new millennium, I entrust to the powerful intercession of Saint Juan Diego the joys and hopes, the fears and anxieties of the beloved Mexican people, whom I carry in my heart.

Blessed Juan Diego, a good, Christian Indian, whom simple people have always considered a saint! We ask you to accompany the Church on her pilgrimage in Mexico, so that she may be more evangelizing and more missionary each day. Encourage the Bishops, support the priests, inspire new and holy vocations, help all those who give their lives to the cause of Christ and the spread of his Kingdom.

Happy Juan Diego, true and faithful man! We entrust to you our lay brothers and sisters so that, feeling the call to holiness, they may imbue every area of social life with the spirit of the Gospel. Bless families, strengthen spouses in their marriage, sustain the efforts of parents to give their children a Christian upbringing. Look with favour upon the pain of those who are suffering in body or in spirit, on those afflicted by poverty, loneliness, marginalization or ignorance. May all people, civic leaders and ordinary citizens, always act in accordance with the demands of justice and with respect for the dignity of each person, so that in this way peace may be reinforced.

When he was 50 years old he was baptized by a Franciscan priest, Fr Peter da Gand, one of the first Franciscan missionaries. On 9 December 1531, when Juan Diego was on his way to morning Mass, the Blessed Mother appeared to him on

Beloved Juan Diego, "the talking eagle"! Show us the way that leads to the "Dark Virgin" of Tepeyac, that she may receive us in the depths of her heart, for she is the loving, compassionate Mother who guides us to the true God. Amen.

After the celebration, before imparting the final blessing the Holy Father said:

At the end of the canonization of Juan Diego, I want to renew my greeting to all of you who have been able to take part, some

Tepeyac Hill, the outskirts of what is now Mexico City. She asked him to go to the Bishop and to request in her name that a shrine be built at Tepeyac, where she promised to pour out her grace upon those who invoked her. The Bishop, who did not believe Juan Diego, asked for a sign to prove that the apparition was true. On 12 December, Juan Diego returned to Tepeyac. Here, the Blessed Mother told him to climb the hill and to pick the flowers that he would find in bloom. He obeyed, and although it was winter time, he found roses flowering. He gathered the flowers and took them to Our Lady who carefully placed them in his mantle and told him to take them to the Bishop as "proof. When he opened his mantle, the flowers fell on the ground and there remained impressed, in place of the flowers, an image of the Blessed Mother, the apparition at Tepeyac.

With the Bishop's permission, Juan Diego lived the rest of his life as a hermit in a small hut near the chapel where the miraculous image was placed for veneration. Here he cared for the church and the first pilgrims who came to pray to the Mother of Jesus.

Much deeper than the "exterior grace" of having been "chosen" as Our Lady's "messenger", Juan Diego received the grace of interior enlightenment and from that moment, he began a life dedicated to prayer and the practice of virtue and boundless love of God and neighbour. He died in 1548 and was buried in the first chapel dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe. He was beatified on 6 May 1990 by Pope John Paul II in the Basilica of *Santa Maria di Guadalupe*, Mexico City.

The miraculous image, which is preserved in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, shows a woman with native features and dress. She is supported by an angel whose wings are reminiscent of one of the major gods of the traditional religion of that area. The moon is beneath her feet and her blue mantle is covered with gold stars. The black girdle about her waist signifies that she is pregnant. Thus, the image graphically depicts the fact that Christ is to be "born" again among the peoples of the New World, and is a message as relevant to the "New World" today as it was during the lifetime of Juan Diego.

in this basilica, others in the nearby areas and many others by means of radio and television. I warmly thank all those I have met in the streets for their affection. In this new saint you have a marvelous example of a just and upright man, a loyal son of the Church, docile to his Pastors, who deeply loved the Virgin and was a faithful disciple of Jesus. May he be a model for you who are so attached to him, and may he intercede for Mexico so that it may always be faithful! Take to all Mexicans the message of this celebration and the Pope's greeting and love for them all!

La Virgen de Guadalupe: National Symbol of Mexico

JOHN SAMAHA, S.M.

One would be hard pressed to find a better example of a highly evocative national symbol than the Virgin of Guadalupe of Mexico. Like her famous Polish counterpart, the Black Madonna of Czestochowa, Our Lady of Guadalupe embodies abstract principles and precepts of the nation where she dwells.

The complexity and heterogeneous nature of Mexico are reconciled in Our Lady of Guadalupe in a special way that no other symbol can rival. Political overtones are blended with individual and societal aspirations, especially for the Indian, because it was an Indian to whom she revealed herself in 1531.

Several decades ago Eric Wolf compiled a masterful analysis of the Guadalupe phenomenon. What follows is an attempt to summarize his findings. With the recent canonization of St. Juan Diego, this topic might be timelier than ever.

Now and then we encounter a symbol that seems to embody the major hopes and aspirations of an entire society. Such a master symbol is Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico's patroness - and Empress of the Americas.

During the Mexican War of Independence against Spain, her image preceded the insurgents into battle. Emiliano Zapata and his agrarian rebels fought under her emblem in the Great Revolution of 1910. Today the Guadalupe image of Juan Diego's tilma adorns house exteriors and interiors, churches and home altars, bull rings and gambling dens, taxis and buses, restaurants and houses of ill repute. Our Lady of Guadalupe is celebrated in song and poetry popular and sacred. Annually her shrine at Tepeyac, a little north of Mexico City, is visited by millions of pilgrims ranging from the Indian villages to the members of socialist trade unions. As one scholarly observer reported, "Nothing to be seen in North America or Europe equals it in the volume and vitality of its moving quality or in the depth of its spirit of religious devotion."

Eric Wolf referred to the holy image and the ideology surrounding it as the Mexican master symbol. He identified it as a cultural form or idiom of behavior operating on the symbolic level, and not restricted to one set of social ties, but referring to a wide range of social relationships.

The history of the image and shrine are well known. The Virgin Mary appeared to Juan Diego, & neophyte Indian of ordinary standing, and addressed him in Nahuatl, his native Indian language. The encounter occurred on the hill of Tepeyac in 1531, ten years after the Spanish Conquest of Tenochtitlan. Mary directed Juan Diego to visit the archbishop of Mexico and to inform him of her desire to have a church built in her honor on Tepeyac. Twice unsuccessful in his mission, Mary miraculously provided her messenger colorful roses in a spot where normally only desert plants would grow. Juan Diego gathered the roses into his tilma, and was told by the Virgin Mother to present the roses and tilma to the Franciscan Bishop-elect Juan Zumarraga. When St. Juan Diego unfolded his tilma before the bishop, the roses cascaded to the floor and the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe was

miraculously impressed to the cloth. The bishop acknowledged the miracle and ordered a shrine to be built where Mary had appeared to her humble servant

Now the tilma bearing the sacred image of Mary is displayed above the main altar of the basilica, showing a young woman with her head lowered demurely in her shawl. She wears an open crown and flowing gown, and stands upon a half moon.

This Marian shrine, however, had been preceded on Tepeyac hill by the pagan temple honoring the earth and fertility goddess, Tonantzin - our lady mother, who like Our Lady of Guadalupe, was also associated with the moon. In pre-Hispanic times, that temple was the site of large scale pilgrimages.

The veneration accorded Our Lady of Guadalupe at first commingled with and was influenced by the earlier pagan worship of Tonantzin. Several Spanish friars attest to this over those early years.

Fray Bernardino de Sahagun writing fifty years after the Spanish Conquest bemoaned the fact that the Indian pilgrims to the shrine were calling Our Lady of Guadalupe Tonantzin, too. "The term refers to that ancient Tonantzin," he wrote, "and this state of affairs should be remedied, because the proper name of the Mother of God is not Tonantzin but Dios and Nantzin. It seems to be a satanic device to mask idolatry."

Later, Fray Martin de Leon expressed a similar concern: "On the hill of Our Lady of Guadalupe they once adored an idol of the goddess called Tonantzin, which means our mother. This is the name they also give to Our Lady, and they always say they are going to Tonantzin, or they are celebrating Tonantzin; and many of them understand this in the old way, and not in the new way."

In the 17th century the syncretism was still alive. Discussing the pilgrimages to the shrine at Tepeyac, Fray Jacinto de la Serna noted, "It is the purpose of the wicked to worship the goddess and not the Most Holy Virgin, or both together."

The cult of Our Lady of Guadalupe increased steadily in the 16th century and thereafter, and gathered emotional impetus during the 17th century. The 17th century saw the first pictorial and artistic representations of the miraculous original; poems were composed in honor of the Virgin and her chosen messenger; sermons presented the implications of her supernatural appearance in Mexico and among Mexicans. Wolf's opinion is that historians tended to neglect the 17th century, which seemed "a kind of Dark Age in Mexico." But in this period the institution of the hacienda begins to dominate Mexican life, and "New Spain" ceases to be "new" and is regarded as Spain. These new experiences required a new cultural idiom, and in the Guadalupe cult the various segments of colonial society found cultural forms in which they expressed their parallel interests and longings.

The evolution of the Guadalupe symbol took on functional aspects in relation to the major social relationships of Mexican society. Primary among these relations are the ties of kinship, and the emotions arising in the interplay of relationships within families. Wolf suggested that some of the meanings of the Virgin symbol in general and the Guadalupe symbol in particular derive from these emotions. He says "derive" rather than "originate" because the form and formation of the family in any given society are themselves determined by other social factors: residence, economy, technology, political power. The family is one relay in the circuit within which symbols are generated in complex societies.

Mexican family life may be understood in terms of two major types of families. The first type of family is congruent with the closed and static life of the Indian village. This is the Indian family. The husband is ideally dominant, but in reality labor and authority are shared equally between both marriage partners. Exploitation of one sex by another is atypical; sexual feats do not add to a person's status in the eyes of others. Physical punishment and authoritarian treatment of children are rare. The second type of family is congruent with the much more open, manipulative life in communities which are actively geared to the life of a nation, a life in which power relationships between individuals and groups are of great moment. This is the Mexican family. The father's authority is unquestioned on both the real and ideal planes. Double standards regarding sex prevail, and male sexuality is charged with a desire to exercise domination. Children are ruled with a heavy hand. Physical punishment is common, even frequent.

The Indian family pattern is consistent with the behavior toward Our Lady of Guadalupe noted by John Bushnell in the Matlazinca-speaking community of San Juan Atzingo in the Valley of Toluca. There the image of the Virgin mother is addressed in passionate terms as a source of warmth and love; and *pulque* (century plant beer) drunk on ceremonial occasions is identified with her milk. Bushnell assumed that Our Lady is identified with the mother as a source of early satisfactions, never again experienced after separation from the mother and emergence into social adulthood. She embodies a longing to return to the pristine state in which hunger and unsatisfactory social relations are minimized. The Mexican family pattern is also consistent with a symbolic identification of Virgin and mother, within a context of male and adult dominance and sexual assertion, discharged against submissive females and children. In this context the Guadalupe symbol is charged with the energy of rebellion against the father. Her image

is the embodiment of hope in a victorious outcome of the struggle between generations.

The symbolism is further extended by that struggle. Successful rebellion against power figures is equated with the promise of life; defeat is equated with the promise of death. John A. McKay saw additional symbolic identification of the Virgin Mother with life, of defeat and death with the crucified Christ. Mexican artistic tradition and Hispanic artistic traditional in general seldom depict Christ as an adult man, but usually as a helpless child, or as a person beaten, tortured, defeated, and killed. This symbolic equation strikes at the roots both of the passionate affirmation of faith in the Virgin Mother, and of the fascination with death which characterizes Baroque Christianity in general, and Mexican Catholicism in particular. Our Lady of Guadalupe stands for life, for health, for hope; Christ on the cross for despair, for death, for salvation.

Supernatural Mother and natural mother are equated symbolically, as are earthly and other-worldly hopes and desires.

However, family relations are seen as only one element in the formation of the Guadalupe symbol. They illuminate the feminine and maternal attributes of the more widespread Virgin symbol. Our Lady of Guadalupe is important to Mexicans not only because she is a Supernatural Mother, but also because she embodies their major religious and political aspirations.

To the Indians the symbol is more than an embodiment of life and hope. It restores to them the hopes of salvation. The Spanish Conquest signified not only military defeat, but the defeat also of the old gods and the decline of the old ritual. The apparition of Our Lady of Guadalupe to an Indian commoner represented in one way the return of Tonantzin. Tannenbaum had observed, "The Church gave the Indian an opportunity not merely to save

his own life, but also to save his faith in his own gods." But on a deeper level the apparition served as a symbolic testimony that the Indians as much as the Spaniards were capable of being saved, capable of receiving Christianity. To be understood properly, this must be seen against the background of the bitter theological and political disputes that followed the Conquest and divided clerics, religious, officials, and conquerors into two camps: those who believed that the Indian was incapable of conversion, was inhuman, and therefore a subject of political and economic exploitation; and those held the opposite and knew that this exploitation had to be tempered by the demands of the Catholic faith and of orderly civil processes of just government. Consequently the Guadalupe event validates the Indian's right to legal defense, fair government, citizenship, and salvation from random oppression.

If that sacred event guaranteed a rightful place to the Indians in the social system of New Spain, it held special appeal to the large group of illegitimate offspring of Spanish fathers and Indian mothers. These progeny were disinherited, impoverished, acculturated, and bereft of any status with the Spanish population or the Indian. For these people there was no proper place in the social order for a considerable length of time. Their very right to exist was questioned because of their inability to command the full rights of citizenship and legal protection. While the Spaniard and the Indian stood squarely within the law, the mestizo landed in the intersections and margins of constituted society. Although they acquired influence and wealth in the 17th and 18th centuries, they still found themselves outside the pale of social recognition and power by the prevailing economic, social, and political order. For them the Guadalupe event symbolized not only the possibility of a place in heaven, but also an assurance of their place in society here and now. Politically the desire for a return to a paradise of food and warmth, a life without defeat and sickness, gave rise to

a wish for an earthly Mexican paradise. There the illegitimate would possess the country and the irresponsible Spanish overlords who never acknowledged the social obligations of their paternity would be driven from the land.

In the writings of 17th century clerics, the Guadalupe event looms as a harbinger of this new order. A book published by Miguel Sanchez in 1648 offered the view that the Spanish Conquest of New Spain is justified solely on the ground that it allowed the Virgin Mary to manifest in her chosen country and to be found in Mexico, a new paradise. As Israel was chosen to produce Christ, Mexico had been chosen to produce Guadalupe. Sanchez equated Our Lady of Guadalupe with the apocalyptic woman of Revelation 12:1, "arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars," who is to realize the prophecy of Deuteronomy 8:7-10 and lead the Mexicans into the Promised Land. Hence, colonial Mexico became the desert of Sinai; independent Mexico the land of milk and honey.

Writing in 1688 Fray Francisco de Florencia coined the slogan that made Mexico not merely another chosen nation, but *the* Chosen Nation: *non fecit taliter omni nationi* (he did not act in such a way for every nation) - words which still adorn the portal of the basilica and shine in lights at night.

An additional elaboration had been expressed on the eve of Mexican independence when Servando Teresa de Mier claimed that Mexico had been converted to Christianity long before the Spanish Conquest. St. Thomas the Apostle had brought the image of Guadalupe Tonantzin to the New World as a symbol of his mission, just as St. James the Elder had converted Spain with the image of Our Lady of the Pillar. This made the Spanish Conquest unnecessary and erasable from the annals of history. In that perspective the Mexican War of Independence marked the final

realization of the apocalyptic promise. The banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe led the insurgents. Their cause was labeled "her law."

In this ultimate extension of the symbol, the promise of life proffered by the Supernatural Mother has become the promise of an independent Mexico, liberated from the Spanish father oppressors and restored to the Chosen Nation whose election had been manifest in the apparition of the Virgin Mary on Tepeyac. The land is finally possessed by the rightful heirs. The symbolic circuit is closed. Mother; food, hope, health, life; supernatural salvation, rescue from oppression; Chosen People, national independence. All find expression in a single master symbol.

The symbol of Our Lady of Guadalupe links together family, politics and religion; colonial past and independent present; Indian and Mexican. This reflects the salient social relationships of Mexican life, and embodies the emotions generated. It provides a cultural idiom through which the import and emotions of these relationships can be expressed. Ultimately the Guadalupe symbol is a way of talking about Mexico: a "collective representation" of Mexican society.

Clarifications regarding Church-State Collaboration on Family and Life Issues in the Archdiocese of Manila

JAIME CARD. SIN, DD

May 13, 2002

Starting February this year news articles have circulated regarding the supposed forging of a Church-Government partnership advancing the natural family planning program in the Archdiocese of Manila.

While we welcome the possibility of a similar collaboration, it has to be clarified that no such agreement has yet been entered into, nor are there any preliminary talks -whatsoever leading to such end.

We likewise take this opportunity to issue the following guidelines for any collaboration with any entity (Government, Non-Government Organizations, private sector, international agencies, and so on) on family and life concerns, including the provision of health services. These guidelines are to be followed in the Archdiocese of Manila.

1. The activities and aims should be in line with Church teachings, as stated in the documents of the Magisterium, and as outlined in the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

2. Prior to teaching any method for the regulation of fertility, the following points have to be discussed: the dignity of the human person, the dignity of the body, the person called to communion, sexuality within marriage as an expression, of total self-donation, and responsible parenthood.

The exercise of responsible parenthood includes either the deliberate and generous decision to raise a numerous family, or the decision, made for grave motives and with due respect for the moral law, to avoid for the time being, or even for an indeterminate period, a new birth. In allowing the couple to decide how many children they want to have, any form of the contraceptive mentality should be avoided.

3. Only the best natural methods for fertility awareness shall be used. The "Billings Ovulation Method" and the "Sympto-Thermal Method", for example, have registered in recent studies a method effectiveness approaching or reaching 100%; they are useful for all women, whether with regular or irregular cycles; and they require only 5-8 straight days abstinence if pregnancy is not desired.

On the other hand, the outdated calendar or rhythm method or any repackaging thereof such as the "necklace method" or "Standard Days Method", are not recommended as their accuracy is only at most around 95%, they are not useful for women with irregular cycles, and the length of abstinence is quite long, around 12 days, if pregnancy is not desired.

4. Funding should not be from sources that could contribute to ills in society (such as drugs, gambling, usury and others).

5. When it comes to fertility regulation services, Church collaboration should not be part of a "cafeteria" system. That is, the other party should not at the same time be promoting contraceptives. Otherwise, from a broader perspective, the Church would be collaborating in a morally unacceptable activity.

The ill effects of contraceptives and abortifacients should also be noted, whether medical (e.g., studies showing that pills may lead to cancer and other side effects; abortifacient effects of pills and IUD's by not allowing implantation of the embryo), methodological (e.g., high failure rates of the condom, which besides does not guarantee 100% protection against AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases), or moral (promiscuity; separation of the unitive and procreative meanings of marriage).

6. The program should not be oblivious the urgent problems of aging and shrinking population in other countries (thus for example last April the United Nations held an international conference on Aging in Madrid), with all their possible consequences to Philippine society, especially that of migration of our best minds and workers, as well as family breakdown. At stake are not only religious values and principles, but economic, social and political as well, the family being the basic unit of society.

Starting Afresh from Christ: A Renewed Commitment to Consecrated Life in the Third Millennium*

CONGREGATION FOR INSTITUTES OF CONSECRATED
LIFE AND SOCIETIES OF APOSTOLIC LIFE

Instruction

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* On May 16, 2002, the Holy Father approved this Document of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemplating the Splendour of the Face of Christ

1. Contemplating Christ's crucified and glorious face¹ and witnessing to his love in the world, consecrated persons joyfully accept the Holy Father John Paul II's pressing invitation at the beginning of the third millennium *to cast out into the deep*: "Due in altum!" (Lk 5:4). These words, echoed throughout the whole Church have enlivened a powerful new hope, reawakened the desire for a more intense evangelical life, and broken open the horizons of dialogue and mission.

Perhaps today, more than ever, *Jesus' invitation to cast out into the deep* appears as a response to the human drama which is the victim of hate and death. The Holy Spirit is always active in history and can draw from human dramas a discernment of the events which is open to the mystery of mercy and peace among peoples. The Spirit, in fact, from the very troubled nature of the nations calls forth in many the dream of a different world already present among us. John Paul II assures young people of this when he exhorts them to be "sentinels of the dawn" who, strong in the faith, keep watch, awaiting the dawn.²

Certainly the dramatic events which have taken place in the world in these recent years have given rise to new and more weighty questions added to those already present, which grow out of a globalized Society. A society with its positive and negative forces in which "not only are technology and economy globalized

¹ Cf. John Paul II, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, Rome, 25 March 1996, 14.

² John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 6 January 2001, 9.

but also insecurity and fear, crime and violence, injustices and war".³

In this situation, *consecrated persons are called by the Spirit to a continual conversion* to give new vigour to the prophetic dimension of their vocation. They who, in fact, are "called to place their very existence at the service of the cause of the Kingdom of God, leaving everything behind and closely imitating the form of life of Jesus Christ, assume a most important teaching role for the whole People of God".⁴

The Holy Father made this expectation clear in his message to the members of the last Plenary Session of our Congregation: "The Church"- he writes - "counts on the continual dedication of this chosen host of her sons and daughters, on their yearning for holiness and upon the enthusiasm of their service to foster and sustain every Christian's striving for perfection and to enhance the common welcoming of neighbor, especially those most in need. In this way, witness is given to the love of Christ among all people".⁵

Walking in the Footsteps of Christ

2. But how do we recognize in the reflection of history and at the present time the signs of the Spirit and *the seeds of the Word*, present now as always in human life and culture?⁶ How do we interpret the signs of the times in a reality such as ours

³ John Paul II, Talk given to Caritas Italiana (24 November 2001): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 November 2001, n.4.

⁴ John Paul II, Message to the Plenary Session of The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life (21 September 2001): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28 September 2001.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Cf. *Ad Gentes*, 11.

in which areas of darkness and mystery abound? As with the disciples on the walk towards Emmaus, the Lord himself must be our travelling companion and grant us his Spirit. Only the Lord, present among us, can help us to fully understand and carry out his word, he can enlighten minds and warm hearts.

"Know that I am with you always, until the end of the world" {Mt 28:20}. The Risen Lord has remained faithful to this promise. Through the presence of the Holy Spirit, from her very beginnings, the Lord has always been present in the Church, lighting her way, flooding her with graces, giving her the strength to live his word ever more intensely and to carry out the mission of salvation as a sign of the unity of all with God and with each other.⁷

Consecrated life, in its continuous development and experience of new forms, is already in itself an eloquent expression of this very presence, almost a kind of Gospel spread out through the centuries. It appears in fact as a "prolongation in history of a special presence of the Risen Lord".⁸ With this assurance, consecrated persons must seek a new impetus in Christian living, making it the force which inspires their journey of faith.⁹

Today's world is expecting to see in consecrated men and women the concrete reflection of Jesus' way of acting, of his love for every person without distinction or qualification. It wants to experience that, with the Apostle Paul, it is possible to say: "I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God who loved *me* and gave his life for *me*" {Gal 2:20}.

⁷ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 1.

* *Vita Consecrata*, 19.

⁹ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29.

Five years after the Apostolic Exhortation "Vita Consecrata"

3. In order to help in the discernment which safeguards this particular vocation, and to support the courageous choice of evangelical witness, at this time, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life held its Plenary Session 25-28 September 2001.

In 1994 the IX Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, having completed the treatment "of the specific identity of the various states of life willed by Jesus for his Church",¹⁰ following the Synods dedicated to the laity and to priests, studied *Consecrated Life and its mission in the Church and in the world*. The Holy Father John Paul II, gathering together the reflections and the hopes of that Assembly, gifted the whole Church with the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*.

Five years after the publication of this fundamental Document of the Church's Magisterium, our Dicastery, in *Plenary Session*, considered the effectiveness with which it has been received and put into practice within communities and Institutes and in the local Churches.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* clearly and profoundly expressed *the Christological and ecclesial dimensions of consecrated life in a Trinitarian theological perspective*, shedding new light on the theology of the following of Christ and of consecration, of communion in community and of mission. It contributed to the creation of a new mentality regarding the mission of consecrated life within the people of God. It helped consecrated persons themselves to capture a greater awareness of the grace of their own vocation.

Vita Consecrata, 4.

This programmatic document remains the most significant and necessary point of reference guiding the path of fidelity and renewal of Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life while at the same time, allowing for the rising of valid proposals for *new forms of consecrated and evangelical life*. It must continue to be studied, understood and put into practice.

Starting Afresh in Hope

4. The Great Jubilee of 2000, which profoundly involved all forms of consecrated life throughout the world, has had a great impact on the life of the Church. On 2 February 2000, preceded by a prayerful preparation, the Jubilee of Consecrated life was celebrated in all the local Churches.

At the end of the Jubilee Year, in the hope that we might cross the threshold of the new millennium together, the Holy Father sought to summarize the heritage of the Jubilee Celebrations in the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*. This text presents, with extraordinary yet predictable continuity, some fundamental themes already mentioned in the Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*: Christ, the centre of life for every Christian,¹¹ the pastoral practice and teaching on holiness, its demanding character, its high standard of ordinary Christian living,¹² the widespread need for spirituality and prayer realized principally in contemplation and in listening to the Word of God,¹³ the irreplaceable effects of the sacramental life,¹⁴ the spirituality of communion,¹⁵ and the witness of Love which is expressed in a new *creativity of charity* towards those

¹¹ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29.

¹² Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 30-31.

¹³ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 32-34, 35-39.

¹⁴ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 35-37.

¹⁵ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43-44.

who suffer, towards a wounded world enslaved in haired, in a spirit of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue.¹⁶

The Members of the Plenary, taking as points of departure the elements received from the Apostolic Exhortation and presented by the experience of the Jubilee as well as the call for a new commitment to holiness, highlighted the questions and hopes pointed out by consecrated persons throughout the world, concentrating on the most important aspects. Their intention was not to produce another doctrinal document but rather to help consecrated life enter into the great pastoral guidelines of the Holy Father with the contribution of his authority and of charismatic service to unity and to the universal mission of the Church. A gift which is shared and put into practice with fidelity to the following of Christ through the evangelical counsels and with the strength of charity daily lived in fraternal communion and in a generous apostolic spirituality.

The special Continental Assemblies of the Synod of Bishops which served as preparations for the Jubilee Year have already addressed the hopes and challenges of consecrated life in the context of the local Churches and cultures. The members of the Plenary did not intend to offer another analysis of the situation. More simply, taking into account the present state of religious life and seeking to remain attentive to the guidelines of the Holy Father, they invite consecrated men and women in their particular situation and culture *to focus primarily on spirituality*. Their reflections contained in these pages are articulated in four parts. Having recognized the rich experiences which consecrated life is experiencing in the Church at the present time, they wished to express their gratitude and their wholehearted esteem *for what consecrated life is and for what it does (Part I)*. They did not close their eyes

¹⁶ Cf. *Novo Millennia Ineunte*, 49, 57.

to the difficulties, trials and challenges which consecrated persons are experiencing today but looked upon them as a new opportunity to rediscover, more profoundly, the meaning and quality of consecrated life (*Part II*). The most important challenge is that of a *renewed commitment to the spiritual life*, starting afresh from Christ in adhering to the Gospel and living the *spirituality of communion* in a unique way (*Part III*). Finally, they wanted to *accompany consecrated persons on the streets of the world* where Christ walked and today is present, where the Church proclaims him as Savior of the world, where the Trinitarian life spreads communion in a renewed mission (*Part IV*).

Part One
CONSECRATED LIFE:
THE PRESENCE OF THE LOVE OF CHRIST
IN THE MIDST OF HUMANITY

5. Considering the presence and many commitments of consecrated men and women in all areas of ecclesial and social life, the members of the Plenary Session wanted to express to them their sincere appreciation, recognition, and solidarity. This is the feeling of the whole Church which the Pope, addressing the Father, the Source of all good, expressed in this way: "We thank you for the gift of consecrated life which seeks you in faith and which through its universal mission invites all people to draw near to you".¹⁷ Through a transformed existence, it participates in the life of the Trinity and confesses it as the love which saves.¹⁸

Consecrated persons - monks and nuns, contemplatives, religious dedicated to the works of the apostolate, members of

¹⁷ *Vita Consecrata*, 111.

¹⁸ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 16.

Secular Institutes and Societies of Apostolic life, hermits and consecrated virgins - truly deserve the gratitude of the ecclesial community. Their existence witnesses to their love for Christ as they walk the path proposed in the Gospel and with deep joy commit themselves to the same style of life which he chose for himself.¹⁹ This praiseworthy fidelity, while not seeking any other approval than that of the Lord, "also becomes *a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting* as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren".²⁰

A Walk in Time

6. It is precisely in the simple day-to-day living that consecrated life progressively matures to become the proclamation of an alternative way of living to that of the world and the dominant culture. Given this style of life and the search for the Absolute, it suggests, as it were, a spiritual therapy for the evils of our time. Thus, it is a blessing and a reason for hope, in the heart of the Church, for human life and the very life of the Church.²¹

In addition to the active presence of new generations of consecrated persons who bring the presence of Christ to the world and the splendour of the ecclesial charisms to life, the hidden and fruitful presence of consecrated men and women who are experiencing old age, loneliness, illness and suffering is also particularly significant. In addition to the service already rendered and the wisdom which they can share with others, they add their own particular precious contribution by joining themselves in their sufferings to the patient and glorious Christ for his Body, the Church (cf. *Col* 1:24).

¹⁹ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 44.

²⁰ *Vita Consecrata*, 22.

²¹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 87.

7. In recent years consecrated life has undertaken paths of deepening, purification, communion and mission. In the realm of community dynamics, personal relationships have intensified and at the same time intercultural exchanges, recognized as a benefit and stimulus for the institutions themselves, have been strengthened. The praiseworthy effort to find an exercise of authority and obedience which affirms, enlightens, brings together, integrates and reconciles, more closely inspired by the Gospel, is appreciated. In response to the Pope's recommendations, sensitivity to the requests of Bishops is increasing and there is a growing collaboration among Institutes in the areas of formation and the apostolate.

Relationships within the whole Christian community are improving with a mutual and complimentary *interchange of gifts* among the various ecclesial vocations.²² It is in fact within the local Churches that concrete pastoral plans which respond to Christ's challenges to reach out to people, to mould communities and to have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in society and culture can be established.²³

From simple formal relationships one willingly moves to a communion lived in mutual charismatic enrichment. This effort can be helpful to all God's people, since the spirituality of communion supplies institutional reality with a soul by prompting a trust and openness wholly in accord with the dignity and responsibility of every baptized person.²⁴

ⁿ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 13; John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laid*, 30 December 1988, 20; *Vita Consecrata*, 31.

²³ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 29.

²⁴ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 45.

For the Holiness of the Whole People of God

8. The call to follow Christ with a special consecration is a gift of the Trinity for God's Chosen People. Recognizing in Baptism the common sacramental origin, consecrated men and women share a common vocation to holiness and to the apostolate with other members of the faithful. By being signs of this universal vocation they manifest the specific mission of consecrated life.²⁵

Consecrated women and men have received a call to a "new and special consecration",²⁶ for the good of the Church, which impels them to live a life in imitation of Christ, the Virgin, and the Apostles with impassioned love.²⁷ In our world this lifestyle stresses the urgency of a prophetic witness which entails "*the affirmation of the primacy of God and of eternal life*", as evidenced in the following and imitation of the chaste, poor and obedient Christ, who was completely consecrated to the glory of God and to the love of his brethren!"²⁸

Consecrated persons extend a persuasive invitation to reflect upon the primacy of grace and to respond to it through a generous spiritual commitment.²⁹ Despite widespread secularization, there is a widespread demand for spirituality which is often expressed as a renewed need for prayer.³⁰ Life's events, even in their ordinari-ness, present themselves as challenges which should be seen in light of conversion. The dedication of consecrated persons to the service of an evangelical quality of life contributes to *the keeping alive in many ways the spiritual practices among the Christian*

²⁵ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 32.

²⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, 31.

²⁷ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 28, 94.

²⁸ *Vita Consecrata*, 85.

²⁹ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 38.

³⁰ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 33.

people. Religious communities increasingly seek to be places for hearing and sharing the Word, for liturgical celebration, for the teaching of prayer, and for accompaniment through spiritual direction. Thus, even without realizing it, this help given to others offers mutual advantages.³¹

On Mission for the Kingdom

9. In imitation of Jesus, those whom God calls to follow him are consecrated and invited to continue his mission in the world. Indeed, consecrated life itself, guided by the action of the Holy Spirit, becomes a mission. The more consecrated persons allow themselves to be conformed to Christ, the more Christ is made present and active in history for the salvation of all.³² Open to the needs of the world as seen through the eyes of God, they point to a future with the hope of resurrection, ready to follow the example of Christ who came among us that we "might have life and have it to the full" (*Jn* 10:10).

Zeal for the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the salvation of brothers and sisters thus constitutes the best proof of a self-offering authentically lived by consecrated persons. That is why every new attempt at renewal can be seen as a new impetus for the evangelizing mission.³³ With the help of ongoing formation consecrated persons learn to choose from among intense spiritual experiences which lead to courageous decisions.

The interventions of the members in the Plenary and the reports presented called forth admiration for the varied missionary activity of consecrated persons. In a particular way we recognize

³¹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 103.

³² Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 72.

³³ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 2.

the preciousness of apostolic work carried out with generosity and the particular richness of the "feminine genius" of consecrated women. *This merits the greatest recognition on the part of all, of pastors and of the faithful.* But the path embarked upon must be deepened and extended. "It is therefore urgently necessary to take certain concrete steps beginning by *providing room for women to participate* in different fields and at all levels including decision making processes".³⁴

A word of thanks is especially extended *to those who find themselves on the front lines.* Availability for the mission is attested to with a courageous outreach to people who are still waiting to hear the first proclamation of the Gospel. Perhaps more than ever before, precisely at a time when some Institutes are experiencing a decrease in numbers, many new foundations have come into being. Looking through the lessons of history for an answer to the hopes of humanity, some Gospel-inspired initiatives and daring have compelled consecrated men and women into difficult positions even to the risk of and the effective sacrificing of life.³⁵

While carrying out the Gospel works of mercy with renewed concern, many consecrated persons are encountering sick people to care for and those in every kind of need, afflicted by old and new forms of poverty. They are making crucial contributions in other ministries as well, such as that of education which enables the faith to mature through catechesis or even in exercising a true intellectual apostolate. With sacrifice and greater collaboration they also sustain the voice of the Church in the means of communication which promote social transformation.³⁶ Deeply convinced of the

³⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, 58.

³⁵ Cf. *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 69; cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 7.

³⁶ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 99.

need, an increased number of men and women religious has chosen to live among those who are excluded. Amidst a humanity in movement, where many are forced to emigrate, these men and women of the Gospel push forward to the *border* for the love of Christ, making the last first.

The highly spiritual contribution which nuns offer to evangelization is also very significant. It is "the soul and yeast of apostolic activity leaving the active participation in it to those whose vocation it is".³⁷ "Thus their lives become a mysterious source of apostolic fruitfulness and blessing for the Christian Community and the whole world".³⁸

Finally, it is fitting to recall that in recent years the *Martyrology of the witnesses of faith and love in consecrated life* has been further and notably enriched. Difficult situations have required from not a few consecrated persons the extreme proof of love in genuine faithfulness to the Kingdom. Consecrated to Christ and to the service of his Kingdom, their witness in following him, has brought them to the point of the cross. Though circumstances might differ and situations might vary the cause of martyrdom is always the same - fidelity to the Lord and to his Gospel: "since it is not the pain which makes the martyr but rather the cause".³⁹

Open to the Spirit

10. This is a time when the Spirit is breaking forth, opening up new possibilities. The charismatic dimension of the diverse

³⁷ Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Verbi Sponsa*, Instruction on the Contemplative Life and the Enclosure of Nuns, Vatican City, 13 May 1999, 7.

³⁸ *Ibid*; cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 7; cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 8, 59.

³⁹ St. Augustine, *Sermo* 331, 2: PL 38, 1460.

forms of consecrated life, while always in progress, is never finished. Cooperating with the Spirit, consecrated persons prepare in the Church for the coming of the One who must come, the One who is already the future of humanity in progress. Like Mary, the first consecrated woman, who in virtue of the Holy Spirit and her total self-giving brought Christ into the world to redeem it through a loving self-sacrifice, consecrated persons, remaining open to the Spirit are today called to *stake everything on charity*, "living the commandment of a practical and concrete love for every human being".⁴⁰ There is a particular bond of life and dynamism between the Holy Spirit and consecrated life. For this reason, consecrated persons must remain open to the Creator Spirit who works in accord with the Father's will, praising the grace which has been given to them in the beloved Son. This same Spirit radiates the splendour of the mystery on all of existence, spent for the Kingdom of God and the needy and abandoned multitude. The future of consecrated life is therefore entrusted to the dynamism of the author and donor of ecclesial charisms which are placed at the service of the full knowledge and realization of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Part Two

COURAGE TO FACE TRIALS AND CHALLENGES

11. A realistic look at the situation of the Church and of the world impels us to also consider the *difficulties encountered in living consecrated life*. We are all aware of the trials and purification which consecrated life is undergoing in these days.

Cf Novo Millennio Ineunte, 49.

The great treasure of the gift of God is held in fragile earthen vessels (cf. 2 Cor 4:7) and the mystery of evil also threatens those who dedicate their whole lives to God. In turning our attention now to the sufferings and challenges which trouble consecrated life today, we do so, not to bring a critical judgment or condemnation but to once again show our wholehearted solidarity and loving closeness as those who seek to share not only the joys but also the sufferings. As we consider some particular difficulties, we will seek to do so from the point of view of those who know that the history of the Church is being led by God and that all things work out unto good for those who love him (cf. Rom 8:28). With this vision of faith even the negative can be an occasion for a new beginning, if one recognizes therein the face of the abandoned and Crucified Christ who took on our limitations even to the point of "bearing our sins in his body on the wood of the cross" (1Pt 2:24).⁴¹ In fact, the grace of God is fully manifested in weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12-9).

Rediscovering the Meaning and Quality of Consecrated Life

12. The difficulties which consecrated persons face today take on many faces, especially if we take into account the different cultural contexts in which they live.

The decrease in members in many Institutes and their ageing, evident in some parts of the world give rise to the question of whether consecrated life is still a visible witness, capable of attracting young people. If, as is affirmed in some places, the third millennium will be the time of promotion of the laity, of associations, and of ecclesial movements, we can rightfully ask: what place will be reserved for the traditional forms of consecrated

⁴¹ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 25-26.

life? Consecrated life, John Paul II reminds us, still has a history to be written together with all the faithful.⁴²

We cannot however ignore that, at times, consecrated life has not seemed to have been held in its proper consideration. There have even been times when there was a lack of confidence in it. Given the ongoing religious crisis which heavily confronts parts of our society, consecrated persons, particularly today, are obliged to look for new forms of presence and to raise not a few questions regarding the meaning of their identity and future.

In addition to the life giving thrust, capable of witness and self-sacrifice to the point of martyrdom, consecrated life also experiences the insidiousness of mediocrity in the spiritual life, of the progressive taking on of middle class values and of a consumer mentality. The complex management of works, while required by new social demands and norms of the State, together with the temptations presented by efficiency and activism, run the risk of obscuring Gospel originality and of weakening spiritual motivations. The prevalence of personal projects over community endeavours can deeply corrode the communion of brotherly and sisterly love.

These are real problems which should not be taken lightly. Consecrated persons are not alone in living the tension between secularism and an authentic life of faith, between the fragility of humanity itself and the power of grace; this is the experience of all members of the Church.

13. The difficulties and the questioning which religious life is experiencing today can give rise to a new *kairos*, a time of grace. In these challenges lies hidden an authentic call of the Holy

⁴² Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 110.

Spirit to rediscover the wealth and potentialities of this form of life.

Having to live in a society where a culture of death often reigns can become a challenge to be stronger witnesses, bearers and servants of life.

The evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, lived by Christ in the fullness of his human nature as the Son of God and embraced for the love of God, appear as a way for the full realization of persons opposed to dehumanization. They are a powerful antidote to the pollution of spirit, life and culture; they proclaim the liberty of the children of God and the joy of living according to the evangelical beatitudes.

The impression which some have of a decline of appreciation of consecrated life in some sectors of the Church can be seen as an invitation to a liberating purification. Consecrated life does not seek praise and human appreciation, it is repaid by the joy of continuing to work untiringly for the kingdom of God, to be a seed of life which grows in secret, without expecting any reward other than that which the Lord will give in the end (cf. *Mt* 6:6). It finds its identity in the call of the Lord, in following him, in unconditional love and service, which are capable of filling a life to the brim and giving it fullness of meaning.

If in some places consecrated persons become *little flocks* because of a decrease in numbers, this can be seen as a providential sign which invites them to recover their very essential tasks of being leaven, sign and prophecy. The greater the mass of dough to be raised, the greater the quality evangelical leaven called for, and the more exquisite the witness of life and charismatic service of consecrated persons.

The growing awareness of the universality of the call to holiness on the part of all Christians,⁴³ far from making the belonging to a state of life particularly adapted to the realization of evangelical perfection superfluous can become an added motive for joy for consecrated persons. They are now closer to the other members of the People of God with whom they share a common path in the following of Christ, in a more authentic communion, in mutual respect, without being superior or inferior. At the same time this awareness challenges them to understand the sign value of consecrated life in relation to the holiness of all the members of the Church.

If in fact it is true that all Christians are called "to the holiness and perfection of their particular state"⁴⁴ consecrated persons, thanks to a "new and special consecration"⁴⁵ have as their mission that of making Christ's way of life shine through the witness of the evangelical counsels thereby supporting the faithfulness of the whole body of Christ. This is not a difficulty, it is rather a challenge to originality and to the specific contribution of the charisms of consecrated life, which are at the same time charisms of shared spirituality and of mission which fosters the holiness of the Church.

Clearly these challenges can constitute a powerful call to deepen the living of consecrated life itself whose witness is needed today more than ever. It is fitting to remember the ability of holy foundresses and founders to respond to the challenges and difficulties of their times with a genuine charismatic creativity.

⁴³ Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, Chapter V.

⁴⁴ *Lumen Gentium*, 42.

⁴⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 31; cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 46.

The Task of Superiors

14. In rediscovering the meaning and quality of consecrated life a fundamental task is that of superiors, to whom the service of authority has been entrusted, a demanding and at times disputed task. It requires a constant presence which is able to animate and propose, to recall the *raison d'être* of consecrated life, and to help those entrusted to them to live in a constantly renewed fidelity to the call of the Spirit. A superior cannot renounce the mission of animation, of brotherly/sisterly support, of proposing, of listening and of dialogue. Only in this way can the entire community find itself united in full communion and in apostolic and ministerial service. The directives offered in our Congregation's document *Fraternal Life in Community* remain a topic of great interest, when, in speaking of the aspects of authority which should be evaluated today, recalls the task of spiritual authority, of authority conducive to unity and an authority capable of making final decisions and assuring their implementation.⁴⁶

A personal and confident participation in the community's life and mission is required of all its members. Even if, in the end, according to proper law, it is the task of authority to make choices and decisions, daily living in community requires a participation which allows for the exercise of dialogue and discernment. Each individual, then, and the whole community can work out their own life with the plan of God, together carrying out God's will.⁴⁷ Coresponsibility and participation are also exercised even in various types of councils at various levels, in order to ensure the constant presence of the Lord who enlightens and guides. The Holy

⁴⁶ Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Fraternal Life in Community*, "Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor", Rome, 2 February 1994, 50.

⁴⁷ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 92.

Father did not hesitate to recall *the ancient wisdom* of the monastic tradition for a correct concrete exercise of the spirituality of communion which promotes and assures the effective participation of all.⁴⁸

A serious ongoing formation program, built into a radical reconsideration of the problem of formation in Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, will help light the way to an authentic path to renewal: renewal in fact "depends primarily upon the formation of their members".⁴⁹

Ongoing Formation

15. The times in which we are living call for a general rethinking of the formation of consecrated men and women, which is no longer limited to one period of life. Not only to enable them to become better able to insert themselves into a reality which changes with a rhythm which is often frenetic but also and more importantly because consecrated life itself, of its nature, calls for the constant openness of those who are called to it. If, in fact, consecrated life is in itself "a progressive taking on of the attitude of Christ",⁵⁰ it seems evident that such a path must endure for a lifetime and involve the *whole* person, heart, mind and strength (cf. Mt 22:37) reshaping the person in the likeness of the Son who gives himself to the Father for the good of humanity. Thus understood, formation is no longer only a teaching period in preparation for vows but also represents a *theological* way of thinking of consecrated life which is in itself a never ending

⁴⁸ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 45.

⁴⁹ Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Directives on Formation in Religious Institutes, Potissimum Institution!*, Rome, 2 February 1990, 1.

⁵⁰ *Vita Consecrate*, 65.

formation "sharing in the work of the Father who, through the Spirit, fashions in the heart the inner attitudes of the Son".⁵¹

Thus it will be important that all consecrated persons be formed in the freedom to learn throughout life, in every age and season, in every human ambient and context, from every person and every culture open to be taught by any fragment of truth and beauty found around them. But above all they must learn to be formed by everyday life, by their own community, by their brothers and sisters, by everyday things, ordinary and extraordinary, by prayer and by apostolic fatigue, in joy and in suffering, until the moment of death.

Openness to the other and to otherness, particularly a relation with time become most important. People in ongoing formation take advantage of time, they don't submit to it. They accept it as a gift and wisely enter into the various rhythms of life itself (days, weeks, months, years) with wisdom, seeking the harmony between them and the rhythm, fixed by an immutable and eternal God which marks the *days, centuries and times*. In a very unique way consecrated persons learn to allow themselves to be moulded by *the liturgical year* in which the mysteries of the life of the Son of God are relived in order to start afresh from Christ and from his death and resurrection everyday of their lives.

Vocation Animation

16. One of the first fruits of a path of ongoing formation is the daily ability to live one's vocation as a gift which is always new and to be accepted with a grateful heart: a gift which calls for an ever more responsible attitude, to be witnessed to with an ongoing conviction and attractiveness so that others might feel

⁵¹ *Vita Consecrata*, 66.

called to God either in this particular vocation or through other paths. The consecrated person is, by nature, also a vocation animator: one who is called cannot not become a caller. There is, therefore, a natural link between ongoing formation and vocation animation.

Service to vocations is one of the most demanding challenges which consecrated life must face today. On the one hand, the globalization of culture and the complexity of social relations make radical and lifelong choices difficult; on the other hand, the world is living through a growing experience of moral and material sufferings which undermine the very dignity of the human being and is silently calling for persons who will powerfully announce a message of peace and hope, persons who will bring the salvation of Christ. We are reminded of the words of Jesus: "The harvest is great but the labourers are few. Pray the master of the harvest to send labourers into his harvest" (*Lk* 10:2; *Mt* 9:37-38).

The first task of any vocational pastoral program is always prayer. Especially in those places where few are choosing to enter into consecrated life, a renewed faith in God who can raise Children of Abraham even from stone (cf. *Mt* 3:9) and make sterile wombs fruitful if called upon in faith, is urgently needed. All the faithful, and especially youth, should be involved in this manifestation of faith in God who alone can call and send workers. The entire local Church - bishops, priests, laity, consecrated persons - is called to assume responsibility for vocations to this particular consecration.

The master plan of vocational promotion to consecrated life is that which the Lord himself began when he said to the apostles John and Andrew, "*Come and see*" (*Jn* 1:39). This encounter accompanied by the sharing of life requires that consecrated persons deeply live their consecration in order to become a visible

sign of the joy which God gives to those who listen to his call. For this reason, there is a need for communities which are welcoming and able to share the ideal of their life with young people, allowing themselves to be challenged by the demands of authenticity, and willing to accept them.

The local Church is the privileged place for this vocational announcement. Here all the ministries and charisms express their complementarity.⁵² Together they realize communion in the one Spirit of Christ in the many ways that it is manifested. The active presence of consecrated persons will help Christian communities to become *laboratories of faith*,⁵³ places of research, of reflection and of meeting, of communion and apostolic service, in which all feel part of the building up of the Kingdom of God. In this way the characteristic climate of the church as God's family, an environment which facilitates mutual knowledge, sharing and the *contagion* of those very values which are at the origin of the choice to give one's whole life to the cause of the Kingdom, is created.

17. Care for vocations is a crucial task for the future of consecrated life. The decrease in vocations particularly in the Western world and their growth in Asia and Africa are drawing a new geography of the presence of consecrated life in the Church and new cultural balances in the lives of Institutes. This state of life which, through the profession, of the evangelical counsels gives a constant visibility to the characteristic features of Jesus in the midst of the world,⁵⁴ is today undergoing a particular period of rethinking and of research with new methods in new cultures. This

⁵² Cf. *Christifideles Laid*, 55.

⁵³ Cf. John Paul II, *Homily at the Vigil of Torvergata* (20 August 2000): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 21-22 August 2000, n.3, p.4.

⁵⁴ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 1.

is certainly a promising beginning for the development of unexplored expressions of its multiple charismatic forms.

The transformations which are taking place directly involve each Institute of Consecrated Life and Society of Apostolic Life, calling them to give strong Gospel-based meaning to their presence in the Church and their service to humanity. Vocational ministry requires the development of new and deeper means of encounter; of offering a living witness of the characteristics of the following of Christ and of holiness, of presenting ways which strongly and clearly announce the freedom which springs from a life of poverty whose only treasure is the kingdom of God, the depths of love of a chaste existence which seeks only one heart, that of Christ, and the strength for sanctification and renewal contained in an obedient life whose only goal is to carry out the will of God for the salvation of the world.

Today vocation promotion is not something which can be delegated in an exclusive way to some specialists dedicated to the task, nor can it be separated from a true, specific youth ministry which first and foremost communicates Christ's love for youth. Every community and all the members of the Institute are called to take on the tasks of contact with youth, of an evangelical teaching of the following of Christ and of handing on the charism. Young people are searching for others who are able to propose styles of authentic evangelical life and ways of arriving at the great spiritual values of human and Christian life. Consecrated persons must rediscover the teaching art of bringing to the surface and freeing the deep questions which are too often kept hidden in one's heart. This is especially true when dealing with young people. As they accompany others on the path of vocational discernment, consecrated persons will be forced to share the source of their identity. Communicating one's own life experience always entails remembering and revisiting that light which guided the person to his or her own particular vocational choice.

The Formative Courses

18. As far as formation is concerned, our Dicastery has issued two documents, *Potissimum Institution^ and Inter-Institute Collaboration for Formation*. However, we are well aware of the constant challenges which Institutes must face in this field.

The new vocations knocking at the doors of consecrated life present great diversity and require personal attention and methods which are able to respond to their concrete human, spiritual and cultural situations. For this reason, a peaceful discernment, freed from the temptations of numbers or efficiency, must take place in order to verify the authenticity of the vocation and the purity of motivation in the light of faith and of possible contradictions. Young people need to be challenged to meet the high ideals of a radical following of Christ and the profound demands of holiness, when discerning a vocation which is beyond them and which perhaps goes beyond the initial ideas which attracted them to enter a particular Institute. For this reason, formation must have the characteristics of the *initiation to the radical following of Christ*. "Since the very purpose of consecrated life is conformity to the Lord Jesus" it is necessary to begin "a path of gradual identification with the attitude of Christ towards the Father".⁵⁵ This will help to integrate theological, humanistic and technical studies with the spiritual and apostolic life of the Institute and will always conserve the characteristic of a "school of holiness".

The most pressing challenges which formation must face grow out of the values of today's globalized culture. The Christian announcement of life as vocation, that is, one which flows from God's loving plan and requires a personal and salvific encounter with Christ in the the Church must confront the dominant ideals

³³ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 65.

and plans of cultures and social histories which are extremely diversified. There is the risk that subjective choices, individual projects and local customs will prevail over the rule, the style of community life and the apostolic projects of the community. This calls for a formative dialogue capable of bringing together the human, social and spiritual characteristics borne by each person, discerning in them the human limitations which must be overcome and the promptings of the Spirit which can renew the lives of individuals and Institutes. In a period of profound changes, formation must be attentive to the need to plant in the hearts of young consecrated persons those human, spiritual and charismatic values necessary to make them suitable to carry out a "creative fidelity"⁵⁶ in the paths of the spiritual and apostolic tradition of the Institute.

Institutes of Consecrated Life are increasingly characterized by cultural, age and project differences. Formation should prepare for community dialogue in the cordiality and charity of Christ, teaching to see diversity as richness and to integrate the various ways of seeing and feeling. Thus the constant search for unity in charity will become a *school of communion* for Christian communities and an example of people living together in communion.

Particular attention must be given to a cultural formation in line with the times and in dialogue with the research of the meaning of human life today. This calls for a greater preparation in the philosophical, theological and psychological fields and a more profound orientation to the spiritual life, models more adapted to the cultures in which new vocations are being born and well-planned programs for ongoing formation. Above all it is hoped

⁵⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, 37.

that the best forces are destined for formation even when this calls for great sacrifices. The use of qualified personnel and their adequate preparation must be a priority commitment.

We must be very generous in dedicating our time and best energies to formation. The consecrated persons themselves are, in fact, the best resources that we have. Without them all formative and apostolic plans remain theory and useless desires. In an era as rushed as ours, perseverance and patient waiting to realize the scope of formation are called for more than ever. In circumstances in which rapidity and superficiality prevail we need serenity and depth because, in reality, a person is fashioned very slowly.

Some Particular Challenges

19. Importance has been placed on the quality of life and the demands of formation because these seem to be the areas which are in most need of attention. The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life wishes to be close to consecrated persons in all problem areas and to continue an ever more sincere and constructive dialogue. The members of the Plenary are aware of this need and have manifested the desire for a greater knowledge of and collaboration with Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life. Their presence in the local Church and particularly that of congregations of diocesan right, consecrated virgins and hermits require special attention on the part of the Bishops and their presbyterates.

In the same way they are aware of the questions posed by religious regarding the great works in which up to now they have been allowed to serve in line with their respective charisms: hospitals, schools, houses of welcome and of retreat. In some parts of the world these are urgently needed, in other parts they are becoming difficult to administer. Creativity, wisdom and dialogue

among members of the Institute, among Institutes with similar works and with those responsible for the local Church are necessary in order to find the right answers.

The themes of inculturation are also very much alive. These deal with the way in which to incarnate consecrated life, adaptation of forms of spirituality and apostolate, ways of governing, formation, use of resources and material goods and the carrying out of mission. The appeals expressed by the Pope regarding the whole Church are also applicable to consecrated life. "In the third millennium, Christianity will have to respond ever more effectively to this *need for inculturation*. Christianity, while remaining completely true to itself, with unswerving faith to the proclamation of the Gospel and the tradition of the Church, will also reflect the different faces of the cultures and peoples in which it is received and takes root".⁵⁷ A true inculturation in consecrated life and in the whole Church will result in a notable enrichment and a new season of spiritual and apostolic growth.

We could endlessly list other expectations of consecrated life at the beginning of this new millennium because the Spirit always pushes us above and beyond. It is the word of the Teacher who, with great enthusiasm, must provoke all of the disciples to remember the past with gratitude, to live the present with enthusiasm and to look forward to the future in confidence.⁵⁸

Listening to the invitation given to the whole Church by John Paul II, consecrated life must clearly start afresh from Christ, contemplating his face, giving preference to the ways of spirituality as life, teaching and pastoral practice. "The Church also awaits your contribution, Consecrated Brothers and Sisters, to advance

⁵⁷ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 1.

this new track of street according to the paths which I outlined in the Apostolic Letter *Novo millennio ineunte*: contemplate the face of Christ, *start afresh* from Him, *witness* to His love".⁵⁹ Only then will consecrated life find new vitality to place itself at the service of the whole Church and all of humanity.

Part Three

SPIRITUAL LIFE IN THE FIRST PLACE

20. Consecrated Life, like all forms of Christian life, is by its nature dynamic and all who are called by the Spirit to embrace it must constantly renew themselves in growing towards that perfect stature of the Body of Christ (cf. *Eph* 4:13). It came into being through the creative prompting of the Spirit who moved founders and foundresses along the Gospel path, giving rise to an admirable variety of charisms. These founders and foundresses, open and docile to the Spirit's guidance, followed Christ more closely, entered into intimacy with him and fully shared in his mission.

Their experience of the Spirit must not only be preserved by those who follow them but must also be deepened and developed.⁶⁰ Today, too, an openness and docility to the Spirit's action which is always new and creative is required. The Spirit alone can keep alive the freshness and authenticity of the beginnings while at the same time instilling the courage of interdependence and inventiveness needed to respond to the signs of the times.

We must therefore allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit to a constantly renewed discovery of God and of his Word, to

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Homily* (2 February 2001): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 2001, p.4.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Mutuae Relationes*, 11; *Vita Consecrata*, 37.

a burning love for God and for humanity and to a new understanding of the charism which has been given. It calls for a concentration on an intense spirituality in the strongest sense of the word, that is, *life according to the Spirit*. Consecrated life today needs a spiritual rebirth which will help to concretely bring about the spiritual and evangelical meaning of baptismal consecration and of its *new and special consecration*.

"The spiritual life must therefore have first place in the programme of Families of consecrated life, in such a way that every Institute and community will be a school of true evangelical spirituality".⁶¹ We must allow the Spirit to superabundantly break open the streams of living water which flow from Christ. It is the Spirit who allows us to recognize the Lord in Jesus of Nazareth (cf. *1 Cor* 12:3) who makes us hear the call to follow him and who unifies us in him. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to Christ (cf. *Rom* 8:9). It is the Spirit who, making us sons and daughters in the Son, gives witness to the paternity of God, makes us aware of our status as sons and daughters and gives us the courage to dare to call him "Abba, Father" (*Rom* 8:15). It is the Spirit who instills love and gives birth to communion. Clearly consecrated life needs a renewed striving for holiness which in the simplicity of everyday life, aims at the radicalness of the Sermon on the Mount⁶² and demanding love, lived in a personal relationship with the Lord, in a life of communion and in the service to every man and woman. It is such an interior newness, entirely animated by the strength of the Spirit and reaching out to the Father, seeking the Kingdom, which will allow consecrated persons to *start afresh from Christ* and be witnesses of his love.

Vita Consecrata, 93.

Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 31.

The call to return to one's own roots and choices in spirituality opens paths to the future. First of all it requires living the fullness of the theology of the evangelical counsels with the model of Trinitarian life as the starting point, according to the teachings of *Vita Consecrata*,⁶³ with a new opportunity to come into contact with the sources of one's own charism and constitutional texts, which are always open to new and more demanding interpretations. This dynamic sense of spirituality provides the opportunity to develop, at this stage of the Church's history, a deeper spirituality which is more ecclesial and communitarian, more demanding and mature in mutual support in striving for holiness, more generous in apostolic choices; finally, a spirituality which is more open to becoming a *teaching and pastoral plan for holiness* within consecrated life itself and in its radiance for the entire people of God. The Holy Spirit is the soul and animator of Christian spirituality; for this reason we must entrust ourselves to the Spirit's action which departs from the intimacy of hearts, manifests itself in communion and spreads itself in mission.

Starting Afresh from Christ

21. Therefore it is necessary to adhere ever more closely to Christ, the centre of consecrated life and once again take up the path of conversion and renewal which, like the initial experience of the apostles, before and after the resurrection, was a *starting afresh from Christ*. Yes, one must start afresh from Christ because it was from him that the first disciples started in Galilee; from him, that throughout history men and women of every status and culture, consecrated by the Spirit in the strength of their call, have started out; for him they have left family and homeland, following

⁶³ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 20-21.

him unconditionally, making themselves available for the announcement of the Kingdom and doing good for all (cf. *Acts* 10:38).

The awareness of one's own poverty and fragility and the greatness of the call have often resulted in the repetition of the words of the apostle Peter, "Leave me Lord, I am a sinful man" (*Lk* 5:8). And yet God's gift was stronger than human weakness. In fact, it is Christ who has made himself present in the communities of those who throughout the centuries have gathered in his name, he taught them about himself and about his Spirit, he oriented them towards the Father, he guided them along the streets of the world to encounter brothers and sisters, he made them instruments of his love and builders of his Kingdom in communion with all the other vocations in the Church.

Consecrated persons can and must start afresh from Christ because he himself first came to them and accompanied them on the path (cf. *Lk.* 24:13-22). Their life is the proclamation of the primacy of grace.⁶⁴ Without Christ they can do nothing (cf. *Jn* 15:5); however, in him who gives strength they can do all (cf. *Phil* 4:13).

22. *Starting afresh from Christ* means proclaiming that consecrated life is a special following of Christ, "*a living memorial of Jesus' way of living and acting as the Incarnate Word in relation to the Father and in relation to the brethren*".⁶⁵ This implies a particular communion of love for Christ who has become the centre of their life and the continual source of every initiative. It is, as the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* reminds us, an experience of sharing, "a special grace of intimacy".⁶⁶ It is "becoming

⁶⁴ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 38.

⁶⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 22.

⁶⁶ *Vita Consecrata*, 16.

one with him, taking on his mind and his way of life",⁶⁷ and it is a life "taken up by Christ",⁶⁸ "touched by the hand of Christ, a life where his voice, is heard, a life sustained by his grace".⁶⁹

The whole life of consecration can be summarized by this point of departure alone: *the evangelical counsels* make sense only in as much as they help to safeguard and foster love for the Lord in full openness to his will; *Community life* is motivated by the One who gathers others around himself and has as its goal the enjoyment of his constant presence; *the mission* is his command leading us to seek his face in the faces of those to whom we are sent to share with them the experience of Christ.

These were the intentions of the founders and foundresses of different communities and Institutes of Consecrated Life. These are the ideals which have motivated generations of consecrated women and men.

Starting afresh from Christ means once again finding one's first love, the inspiring spark which first gave rise to the following. The primacy of love is his. The following is only a response in love to the love of God. If "we love" it is "because he first loved us"(/ Jn 4:10,19). This means recognizing his personal love with that heartfelt awareness which made the apostle Paul say: "Christ loved *me* and gave up his life for *me*" {Gal 2:20}.

Only the awareness of being infinitely loved can help us overcome every personal and institutional difficulty. Consecrated persons cannot be creative, capable of renewing the Institute and opening new pastoral paths if they do not feel loved with this love. It is this love which makes them strong and courageous which instills fire and enables them to dare all.

⁶⁷ *Vita Cpnsecrata*, 18.

⁶⁸ *Vita Consecrata*, 25.

^w *Vita Consecrata*, 40.

The vows with which one commits oneself to live the evangelical counsels confer their radicalness as a response to love. Virginity opens the heart to the measure of Christ's heart and makes it possible to love as he loved. Poverty frees one from the slavery to things and to artificial needs which drive consumer society and leads to the rediscovery of Christ, the only treasure truly worth living for. Obedience places life entirely in Christ's hands so that he may use it according to God's design and make it a masterpiece. Courage is needed for a generous and joyous following.

Contemplating the Faces of Christ

23. The path which consecrated life is called to take up at the beginning of the new millennium is guided by the contemplation of Christ with a gaze *fixed, more than ever, on the face of the Lord.*¹⁰ But where does one concretely contemplate the face of Christ? There are a multiplicity of presences to be discovered in ways that are ever new.

Christ is truly present in his Word and in the Sacraments, especially in the Eucharist. Christ lives in the Church, he makes himself present in the community of those who are gathered in his name. He is before us in every person, identifying himself in a special way with the small, the poor, those who suffer and those most in need. He meets us in every event happy or sad, in trials arid in joys, in pain and in sickness. •

Holiness is the fruit of the encounter with him in the many presences in which we can discover his face as the Son of God, a suffering face and at the same time the face of the Risen One. As he once made himself present in daily life he is still present in daily life today where he continues to show his face. Recogn-

nizing him requires a gaze of faith which is acquired through the habitual reading of the Word of God, through prayer and above all through the exercise of charity because the Mystery can only be fully known through love.

We can recall some privileged *places* in which the face of Christ can be contemplated, *for a renewed commitment in the life of the Spirit*. These are walking the paths of a lived spirituality, a priority commitment in this time, taking the opportunity to re-read in life and in daily experiences the spiritual riches of one's own charism, through of a renewed contact with the same sources which, inspired by the founders' and foundress' experience of the Spirit, gave rise to the spark of new life and new works, the specific re-reading of the Gospel found in every Charism.

The Word of God

24. John Paul II reminds consecrated persons that living spirituality means first of all starting afresh from the person of Christ, true God and true man, present in his Word, "the first source of all spirituality".⁷¹ Holiness is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the word of God. In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, we read: "It is especially necessary that listening to the Word of God should become a life giving encounter... which draws from the biblical text the living Word which questions, directs and shapes our lives".⁷² It is there, in fact, where the Master reveals himself and educates the mind and the heart: It is there that the vision of faith matures, learning to look at reality and events through the eyes of God, to the point of having "the mind of Christ" (7 *Cor* 2:16).

It was the Holy Spirit who sparked the Word of God with new light for the founders and foundresses. Every charism and

⁷¹ *Vita Consecrata*, 94.

⁷² *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 39.

every Rule springs from it and seeks to be an expression of it. In continuity with founders and foundresses their disciples today are called to take up the Word of God and to cherish it in their hearts so that it may be a lamp for their feet and a light for their path (cf. *Ps* 118:105). The Holy Spirit will then be able to lead them to the fullness of truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13).

The Word of God is nourishment for life, for prayer and for the daily journey, the principle which unifies the community in oneness of thought, the inspiration for ongoing renewal and apostolic creativity. The Second Vatican Council had already indicated that the first great principle of renewal is a return to the Gospel.⁷³

Within communities and in groups of consecrated men and women, as in the whole Church, a more lively and immediate contact with the Word of God has developed in recent years. It is a path which must continue to be walked down with an ever greater intensity. The Pope has said: "You must not tire of meditating on *Holy Scripture* and above all on the *Gospels* so that they can imprint upon you the features of the Incarnate Word".⁷⁴

Community life also fosters the rediscovery of the ecclesial dimension of the Word: receive it, meditate upon it, live it together, communicate the experiences which blossom from it and thus submit yourself to an authentic spirituality of communion.

In this context it is good to remember the need for constant reference to the Rule, because in the Rule and in the Constitutions "there is a map for the whole journey of discipleship in accordance with a specific charism confirmed by the Church".⁷⁵ This way of

⁷³ Cf. *Perfectae Caritatis*, 2.

⁷⁴ John Paul II, *Homily* (2 February 2001): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 2001.

⁷⁵ *Vita Consecrata*, 37.

following translates the particular interpretation of the Gospel given by the founders and foundresses as the result of a particular prompting of the Spirit and it helps the members of the Institute live concretely according to the Word of God.

Nourished by the word, made new, free and conformed to the Gospels, consecrated men and women can be authentic *servants of the Word* in the task of evangelization. This is how they carry out a priority for the Church at the beginning of the new millennium: "we must rekindle in ourselves the impetus of the beginnings and allow ourselves to be filled with the ardour of the apostolic preaching which followed Pentecost".⁷⁶

Prayer and Contemplation

25. Prayer and contemplation provide the ambient for the reception of the Word of God and at the same time they spring from listening to the Word. Without an interior life of love which draws the Word, the Father and the Spirit to itself, an outlook of faith is impossible (cf. *Jn* 14:23). As a consequence life itself loses meaning, the faces of brothers and sisters are obscured and it becomes impossible to recognize the face of God in them, historical events remain ambiguous and deprived of hope and apostolic and charitable mission become nothing more than widespread activity.

Every vocation to consecrated life is born in contemplation, from moments of intense communion and from a deep relationship of friendship with Christ, from the beauty and light which was seen shining on his face. From there the desire to always be with the Lord - and to follow him - matures: "how good it is for us to be here" (*Mt* 17:4). Every vocation must constantly mature in this intimacy with Christ. "Your first task therefore" - John Paul

Novo Millennio Ineunte, 40.

reminds consecrated persons - "cannot not be in the line of *contemplation*. Every reality of consecrated life is born and is regenerated each day in the unending contemplation of the face of Christ".⁷⁷

Monks and cloistered nuns like hermits dedicate more time to praise of God as well as to prolonged silent prayer. Members of Secular Institutes, like consecrated virgins in the world, offer to God the joys and sorrows, the hopes and petitions of all people and contemplate the face of Christ which they recognize in the faces of their brothers and sisters, in the historical events, in the apostolate and in everyday work. Religious men and women dedicated to teaching, to the care of the sick, to the poor, encounter the face of the Lord there. For missionaries and members of Societies of Apostolic Life the proclamation of the Gospel is lived according to the example of St. Paul, as authentic cult (cf. *Rm* 1:6). The whole Church enjoys and benefits from the many forms of prayer and the variety of ways in which the one face of Christ is contemplated.

At the same time it is noticeable that, for many years now, the liturgical prayer of the Hours and the celebration of the Eucharist have assumed a central position in the life of all types of communities and of fraternities, once again giving them a biblical and ecclesial vigour. They also foster mutual edification and can become a witness to be before God and with God, "*a house and a school of communion*".^{1*} An authentic spiritual life requires that everyone, in all the diverse vocations, regularly dedicate, every day, appropriate times to enter deeply into silent conversation with him by whom they know they are loved, to share

⁷⁷ John Paul II, *Homily* (2 February 2001): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 2001.

⁷⁸ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 43.

their very lives with him and to receive enlightenment to continue on the daily journey. It is an exercise which requires fidelity, because we are constantly being bombarded by the estrangements and excesses which come from today's society, especially from the means of communication. At times fidelity to personal and liturgical prayer will require a true effort not to allow oneself to be swallowed up in frenetic activism. Otherwise it will be impossible to bear fruit. "No more than a branch can bear fruit of itself apart from the vine can you bear fruit apart from me" (Jn 15:4).

The Eucharist, a Privileged Place for Encounter with the Lord

26. Giving a priority place to spirituality means starting afresh from the rediscovered *centrality of the Eucharistic celebration*, a privileged place of encounter with the Lord. There he once again makes himself present in the midst of the disciples, he explains the Scriptures, he warms the heart and enlightens the mind, he opens eyes and allows himself to be recognized (cf. Lk 24:13-35). John Paul II's invitation extended to consecrated persons is particularly vibrant: "My dearest ones, encounter him and contemplate him in a very special way in the Eucharist, celebrated and adored every day as source and summit of existence and apostolic action".⁷⁹ In the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* he called for participation in the Sacrament of the Eucharist and assiduous and prolonged Eucharistic adoration daily.⁸⁰ The Eucharist, the memorial of the Lord's sacrifice, the heart of the life of the Church and of every community, fashions from within the renewed offering of one's very existence, the project of community life and the

⁷⁹ John Paul II, *Homily* (2 February 2001): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 2001.

⁸⁰ *Vita Consecrata*, 95.

apostolic mission. We all need the daily *viaticum* of encounter with the Lord in order to bring every day life into sacred time which is made present in celebration of the Lord's Memorial.

Here the fullness of *intimacy* with Christ is realized, *becoming one with him, total conformity to him* to whom consecrated persons are called by vocation.⁸¹ In fact, in the Eucharist, Jesus joins us to himself in his very paschal offering to the Father. We offer and are offered. Religious consecration itself assumes a Eucharistic structure, it is the total offering of self closely joined to the Eucharistic Sacrifice.

In the Eucharist all forms of prayer come together, the Word of God is proclaimed and received, relationships with God, with brothers and sisters, with all men and women are challenged. It is the Sacrament of filiation, of communion and of mission. The Eucharist, the Sacrament of unity with Christ, is at the same time the Sacrament of Church unity and community unity for the consecrated person. Clearly it is "The source of spirituality both for individuals and for communities".⁸²

In order to fully produce the expected fruits of communion and renewal, the essential conditions must be present, especially mutual forgiveness and the commitment to love one another in accord with the Lord's teaching; full reconciliation is necessary before presenting one's offering at the altar (cf. *Mt* 5:23). The Sacrament of unity cannot be celebrated while remaining indifferent to others. On the other hand, it must be remembered that these *essential conditions* are also *the fruit and sign* of a well-celebrated Eucharist because it is especially in communion with the Eucharistic Jesus that we are enabled to love and to forgive.

⁸¹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 18.

⁸² *Vita Consecrata*, 95.

Moreover, every celebration should become the occasion to renew the commitment of giving one's life for others in acceptance and in service. Thus, Christ's promise, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst" (*Mt* 18:20), would hold true, in the fullest sense, for the Eucharistic celebration, and gathered around the Eucharist, the community will be renewed daily.

Meeting these conditions the community of consecrated persons which lives the Paschal Mystery, renewed daily in the Eucharist, becomes a witness of communion and a prophetic sign of solidarity for a divided and wounded society. In fact, the spirituality of communion, so necessary to establish the dialogue of charity needed in today's world, is born in the Eucharist.⁸³

The Face of Christ in Trials

27. Living spirituality in a continual *starting afresh from Christ* means always starting from the greatest expression of his love - and the Eucharist relives the mystery of this moment - when on the cross Jesus gives his very life as the greatest gift of self. Those who have been called to live the evangelical counsels through profession must frequently contemplate the face of the Crucified One.⁸⁴ He is the source from whom we learn what love is and how God and humanity should be loved, the source of all charisms, the summary of all vocations.⁸⁵ Consecration, a total sacrifice and perfect holocaust, is the way suggested to them by the Spirit to relive the mystery of the Crucified Christ, who came into the world to give his life as a ransom for many (cf. *Mt* 20:28; *Mk* 10:45) and to respond to his infinite love.

Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 51.

Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 25-27'.

Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 23.

The history of consecrated life has expressed this configuration to Christ in many ascetic forms which "have constituted and continue to constitute an authentic path to holiness. Asceticism... is truly indispensable if consecrated persons are to remain faithful to their own vocation and follow Jesus on the way of the cross".⁸⁶ Today, consecrated persons, while maintaining the experience of the centuries, are called to find forms which are consonant with our times. Forms which assure a generosity of service and support the fatigue of apostolic work. Today, the cross which they take up daily (cf. *Lk* 9:23), such as the age of the Institute, structural inadequacy, and uncertainty regarding the future, can also take on collective value.

In the face of so many personal, communal and social sufferings one can hear the cry of Christ on the cross, "Why have you abandoned me?" (*Mk* 15:34), reechoed in the hearts of individuals or of whole communities. In that cry, addressed to the Father, Jesus makes us understand that his solidarity with humanity was so radical that it penetrated, shared and assumed every negative aspect even to death, the fruit of sin. "In order to bring men back to the Father's face, Jesus not only had to take on the face of man, but he had to burden himself with the 'face' of sin".⁸⁷

Starting afresh from Christ means recognizing that sin is still radically present in the heart and life of all, and discovering in the suffering face of Christ that offering which reconciled humanity with God.

Throughout the history of the Church, consecrated women and men have contemplated the *suffering face* even outside themselves. They recognized it in the sick, the imprisoned, the

Vita Consecrata, 38.

Novo Millennio Ineunte, 25.

poor and the sinner. Their battle was primarily against sin and its fatal consequences: Jesus' proclamation "Convert and believe the Good News" (*Mk* 1:15) moved them to reach out to others and provided the hope of new life where discouragement and death reigned. Their service has brought many men and women to experience the merciful embrace of God the Father in the Sacrament of Penance. Today too, there is a need to strongly repropose this *ministry of reconciliation* (cf. *2 Cor* 5:18) entrusted by Jesus Christ to the Church. This is the *mysterium pietatis*** which consecrated men and women are called to experience frequently in the Sacrament of Penance.

Today new faces are appearing in which to recognize, love and serve the face of Christ where he has made himself present; *they are the new material moral and spiritual poverties* produced by contemporary society. The cry of Jesus on the cross reveals how he took all this evil upon himself in order to redeem it. The vocation of consecrated persons continues to be that of Jesus and like him they take upon themselves the pain and the sin of the world, consuming them in love.

The Spirituality of Communion

28. If "*the spiritual life must have first place in the program of the Families of consecrated life*"^m it should be above all a spirituality of communion suitable for the present time. "To make the Church the home and school of communion: that is the great challenge facing us in the millennium which is now beginning, if we wish to be faithful to God's plan and respond to the world's deepest yearnings".⁹⁰

Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 37.

Vita Consecrata, 93.

Novo Millennio Ineunte, 43.

The whole Church expects a clear contribution to this undertaking from consecrated life because of its specific vocation to a life of communion in love. In *Vita Consecrata* we read "*Consecrated Persons* are asked to be true experts of communion and to practice its spirituality as witnesses and artisans of that plan of communion which stands at the center of history according to God".⁹¹

Moreover, we are reminded that one of the tasks of consecrated life today is that of *spreading the spirituality of communion*, first of all in their internal life and then in the Church community, and even beyond its boundaries, by beginning or continuing a dialogue in charity, especially in those places where today's world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence".⁹² This is a task which requires spiritual persons interiorly shaped by God, by loving and merciful communion and by mature communities where the spirituality of communion is the rule of life.

29. But what is the spirituality of communion? With incisive words, capable of giving new life to relationships and programs, John Paul II teaches: "A spirituality of communion indicates above all the heart's contemplation of the mystery of the Trinity dwelling within us and whose light we must also be able to see shining on the faces of the brothers and sisters around us. A spirituality of communion also means an ability to think of our brothers and sisters in faith within the profound unity of the Mystical Body and therefore as 'those who are part of me'...". Some consequences of *feeling* and *doing* derive from this principal with convincing logic: sharing the joys and sufferings of our brothers and sisters; sensing their desires and attending to their needs; offering them true and profound friendship. The spirituality of communion also

Vita Consecrata, 46.

Vita Consecrata, 51.

implies the ability to see what is positive in others, to welcome it and to prize it as a gift from God, and to know how to make room for others, sharing each other's burdens. Unless we follow this spiritual path, the external structures of communion serve very little purpose.⁹³

The spirituality of communion which appears to reflect the spiritual climate of the Church at the beginning of the third millennium is an active and exemplary task for consecrated life on all levels. It is the principle highway for the future of life and witness. Holiness and mission come through the community because in and through it Christ makes himself present. Brother and sister become Sacraments of Christ and of the encounter with God, the concrete possibility, and even more, the unsurpassable necessity in carrying out the commandment to love one another and bring about Trinitarian communion.

In recent years communities and various types of fraternities of consecrated persons are seen as places of communion where relationships seem to be less formal and where acceptance and mutual understanding are facilitated. The divine and human value of being together freely in friendship and sharing even moments of relaxation and recreation together as disciples gathered around Christ the Teacher is being rediscovered.

Moreover there is a more intense communion among the different communities of the same Institute: multi-cultural and International communities, called to "witness to the sense of communion among peoples, races, and cultures",⁹⁴ are already in many areas a positive reality where mutual knowledge, respect, esteem and enrichment are being experienced. They prove to be

⁹³ Cf. *Novo Milletmio Ineunte*, 43.

⁹⁴ *Vita Consecrata*, 51.

training grounds for integration and inculturation and at the same time a witness to the universality of the Christian message.

The Exhortation *Vita Consecrata*, presenting this form of life as a *sign of communion in the Church*, emphasized all the wealth and demands expected of community life. Earlier our Dicastery had promulgated the document *Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor*, on community life. Every community should periodically go back to these documents to evaluate its own journey of faith and progress in communion.

Communion between Old and New Charisms

30. The communion which consecrated persons are called to live goes far beyond their own religious family or Institute. Opening themselves to communion with other Institutes and other forms of consecration, they can spread communion, rediscover their common Gospel roots and together grasp the beauty of their own identity in the variety of charisms with greater clarity. They should compete in mutual esteem (cf. *Rm* 12:10), striving for the greater gift, charity (cf. *1 Cor* 12:31).

Meeting and solidarity among institutes are thus encouraged, aware that "communion is closely linked to the Christian community's ability to make room for all the gifts of the Spirit. The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities. It is the reality of many members joined in a single body, the one Body of Christ (cf. *1 Cor* 12:12)".⁹⁵

It can be the beginning of a joint search for common ways of serving the Church. External factors, such as having to comply with the new demands of States and internal Institute factors such as the decrease in the number of members, have already led to

the coordination of efforts in the fields of formation, the management of goods, education and evangelization. Even in these situations we can find the Spirit's invitation to a more intense communion. The Conferences of Major Superiors and Conferences of Secular Institutes are to be supported at all levels in this task.

The future can no longer be faced in isolation. There is a need to be Church, to together live the adventure of the Spirit and of the following of Christ, communicating the experience of the Gospel, learning to love the other's community and religious family as one's own. The joys and sorrows, the concerns and successes belong to everyone and can be shared.

Dialogue and communion are also sought from new forms of evangelical life. These new associations of evangelical life, *Vita Consecrata* reminds us, "*are not alternatives* to already existing Institutions, which continue to hold the pre-eminent place assigned to them by tradition... The older institutes, many of which have been tested by the severest of hardships, which they have accepted courageously down the centuries, can be enriched through dialogue and an exchange of gifts with the Foundations appearing in our own day".⁹⁶

Finally, a new richness can spring from an encounter and communion with the charisms of ecclesial movements. Movements can often offer the example of evangelical and charismatic freshness such as the generous, creative initiatives in evangelization. On the other hand, movements as well as new forms of evangelical life can learn a great deal from the faithful, joyful and charismatic witness of consecrated life which bears a very rich spiritual patrimony, the many treasures of experience and wisdom and a great variety of apostolates and missionary commitments.

Vita Consecrata, 62.

Our Dicastery has already offered criteria and directives for the insertion of Religious men and women into ecclesial movements which are still valid.⁹⁷ What we would rather stress here is the relationship of knowledge and collaboration, of esteem and sharing which could be inserted not only among individuals but also among Institutes, ecclesial movements, and new forms of consecrated life in view of a growth in life in the Spirit and of the carrying out of the Church's one mission. It is a question of recognizing which came about through the promptings of the same Spirit to bring about the fullness of evangelical life in the world, coming together to realize God's one plan for the salvation of all. The spirituality of communion is realized precisely in this vast dialogue of evangelical fraternity among all segments of the people of God.⁹⁸

In Communion with the Laity

31. The experience of communion among consecrated persons results in an even greater openness to all other members of the Church. The command to love one another experienced in the internal life of the community must be transferred from the personal level to that of the different ecclesial realities. Only in an integrated ecclesiology, wherein the various vocations are gathered together as the one people of God, can the vocation to consecrated life once again find its specific identity as sign and witness. The fact that the charisms of founders and foundresses, having been born of the Spirit for the good of all, must once again be placed at the centre of the Church, open to communion and participation by all the People of God, is being increasingly discovered.

Cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 62; cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 56.

Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 45.

In this line we can see that a new type of communion and collaboration within the various vocations and states of life especially among consecrated persons and laity is beginning." Monastic and contemplative Institutes can offer the laity a relationship that is primarily spiritual and the necessary spaces for silence and prayer. Institutes committed to the apostolate can involve them in forms of pastoral collaboration. Members of Secular Institutes, lay or clerical, relate to other members of the faithful at the level of everyday life.¹⁰⁰

The new phenomenon being experienced in these days is that some members of the laity are asking to participate in the charismatic ideals of Institutes. This has given rise to interesting initiatives and new institutional forms of association. We are experiencing an authentic re-flourishing of ancient institutions, such as the secular orders or third orders, and the birth' of new lay associations and movements linked to religious Families and Secular Institutes. Whereas at times in the recent past, collaboration came about as a means of supplementing the decline of consecrated persons necessary to carry out activities, now it is growing out of the need to share responsibility not only in the carrying out of the Institute's works but especially in the hope of sharing specific aspects and moments of the spirituality and mission of the Institute. This calls for an adequate formation of both consecrated persons and laity to ensure a collaboration which is mutually enriching.

Whereas in times past it was especially the task of religious men and women to create, spiritually nourish and direct aggregate forms of laity, today, thanks to an every increasing formation of the laity, there can be a mutual assistance which fosters an understanding of the specificity and beauty of each state of life.

Cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, 70.

¹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 54.

Communion and mutuality in the Church are never one way streets. In this new climate of ecclesial communion, priests, religious and laity, far from ignoring each other or coming together only for a common activity, can once again find the just relationships of communion and a renewed experience of evangelical communion and mutual charismatic esteem resulting in a complementarity which respects the differences.

This ecclesial dynamic will be helpful to the renewal and identity of consecrated life. As the understanding of the charism deepens, ever new ways of carrying it out will be discovered.

In Communion with Bishops

32. A unique aspect in this relationship of ecclesial communion with all the vocations and states of life is that of unity with Bishops. The hope of cultivating a spirituality of communion without an effective and affective relationship with the Bishops, primarily with the Pope, the center of unity of the Church and with his Magisterium, would be in vain.

It is the concrete application of *feeling with the church* proper to all the faithful¹⁰¹ which especially shines in the founders and foundresses of consecrated life and which becomes the charismatic task of all Institutes. It is impossible to contemplate the face of God without seeing it shine in that of the Church. To love Christ is to love the Church in her persons and institutions.

Today, more than ever, in the face of the recurring centrifugal forces which place fundamental principles of the Catholic faith and morals in doubt, consecrated persons and their institutions are called to give proof of unity without disagreement with the

Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, 12; *Vita Consecrata*, 46.

Magisterium of the Church, becoming convinced and joyful spokespersons before all.

It is fitting to stress what the Pope has already affirmed in *Vita Consecrata*: "A distinctive aspect of ecclesial communion is allegiance of mind and heart to the Magisterium (of the Pope and) of the Bishops, an allegiance which must be lived honestly and clearly witnessed to before the People of God by all consecrated persons, especially those involved in theological research, teaching, publishing, catechesis and the use of the means of social communications".¹⁰² At the same time it is recognized that many theologians are Religious and many centres of research are directed by Institutes of Consecrated Life. They praiseworthily carry out this responsibility in the cultural world. The Church guards with *confident attention* their intellectual commitment in the face of the delicate front line issues which the Magisterium must face.¹⁰³

The Church documents of the past ten years have constantly taken up the conciliar style which invites the Bishops to evaluate the specific charisms in the overall pastoral picture. At the same time they encourage consecrated persons to clearly and confidently make known and to offer their own proposals for presence and work in conformity with their specific vocation.

This also holds true, in some ways, in relationships with the Diocesan clergy. The majority of religious daily collaborate with priests in pastoral ministry. It is therefore essential to make use of all initiatives which foster greater mutual knowledge and esteem.

Only in harmony with the spirituality of communion and with the teaching outlined in *Novo Millennio Ineunte* can the Holy Spirit's gifts to the Church through the charisms of consecrated

Vita Consecrata, 46

Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 98.

life be recognized. The coexistence in the life of the Church between the charismatic elements and the hierarchical elements which John Paul II has often mentioned when referring to new ecclesial movements¹⁰⁴ also holds true, in a special way, for consecrated life. Love and service in the Church must always be lived in a reciprocity of mutual charity.

Part Four

WITNESSES TO LOVE

Knowing and Serving Christ

33. A life transformed by the evangelical counsels becomes a prophetic and silent witness and at the same time an eloquent protest against an inhuman world. It calls for the promotion of the individual and for a new *creativity of charity*. We have seen it in the holy founders. It is manifested not only in the effectiveness of their service but especially in their ability to identify with those who suffer in such a way that the helping hand is experienced as heartfelt sharing. This kind of evangelization, realized through works characterized by love and dedication, ensures an unmistakable efficacy to the charity of words.¹⁰⁵

In its own right, the life of communion is the first message of consecrated life, since it is an efficacious *sign* and persuasive *force* which leads to belief in Christ. Thus, communion itself is mission, indeed "*communion begets communion* and is essentially a *missionary communion*".¹⁰⁶ Communities once again find them-

¹⁰⁴ John Paul II, in *Movements in the Church*, Acts of the II International Colloquium, Milan 1987, pp.24-25; *Movements in the Church*, Vatican City 1999, p.18.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 50.

¹⁰⁶ *Christifideles Laid*, 31-32.

selves wanting to follow Christ on the paths of human history,¹⁰⁷ with an apostolic fervour and a witness of life which conforms to their individual charism.¹⁰⁸ "Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic outreach, which will be lived *as the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups* is needed".¹⁰⁹

34. When one starts afresh from Christ the spirituality of communion becomes a strong and solid spirituality of disciples and apostles of his Kingdom. For consecrated persons this means committing themselves in service to their brothers and sisters in whom they recognize the face of Christ. In the exercise of this apostolic mission *being* and *doing* are inseparable because the mystery of Christ constitutes the absolute base for all pastoral action.¹¹⁰ "The contribution of consecrated persons, both men and women, to evangelization is, first of all, the witness of a life given totally to God and to their brothers and sisters, imitating the Saviour who, out of love for humanity, made himself a servant".¹¹¹ Consecrated persons do not limit themselves to giving only part of their time but rather give their whole life to participating in the mission of the Church.

In *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, it seems that the Pope wants to make even greater strides in concrete love for the poor. "The century and the new millennium now beginning will need to see, and hopefully with still greater clarity, to what length of dedication

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 46.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Church in Africa*, Yaounde, 14 September 1995, 94.

¹⁰⁹ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40.

¹¹⁰ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 15.

¹¹¹ *Vita Consecrata*, 76.

the Christian community can go in charity towards the poorest. If we have truly started out anew from the contemplation of Christ, we must learn to see him especially in the faces of those with whom he himself wished to be identified: 'I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me' (Mt 25:35-36). This Gospel text is not a simple invitation to charity, it is a page of Christology which sheds a ray of light on the mystery of Christ. By these words, no less than by the orthodoxy of her doctrine, the Church measures her fidelity as the Bride of Christ".¹¹² The Pope also offers a concrete direction of spirituality with the invitation to recognize in the person of the poor a *special presence* of Christ *which imposes upon the Church a preferential option for them*. It is through such an option that consecrated persons also¹¹³ must witness to "the nature of God's love, to his providence and mercy".¹¹⁴

35. The field in which John Paul invites us to work encompasses the whole world. Facing this scenario, consecrated persons "must make their act of faith in Christ by discerning his voice in the cry for help that rises from this world of poverty".¹¹⁵ Finding the proper balance between the universal breath of a missionary vocation and its insertion into the context of a local church will be the primary challenge for all apostolic activity.

Despair at the lack of meaning in life, drug addiction, fear of abandonment in old age or sickness, marginalization or social discrimination are new forms of poverty which have been added

¹¹² *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 49.

¹¹³ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 82.

¹¹⁴ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 49.

¹¹⁵ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 50.

to its traditional forms."⁶ Mission, in its traditional and new forms, is first of all a service to the dignity of the person in a dehumanized society because the greatest and most serious poverty of our time is the callous treading upon the rights of the human person. With the dynamism of charity, of forgiveness and of reconciliation, consecrated persons strive in justice to build a world which offers new and better possibilities for the life and development of the individual. Having the spirit of one who is poor, cleansed of self-interest, ready to exercise a service of peace and non-violence in a spirit of solidarity and full of compassion for the suffering of others is essential for this intervention to be effective. The way of proclaiming God's word and carrying out God's deeds, begun by Jesus (cf. *Lk* 4:15-21) and lived by the primitive Church cannot be forgotten at the end of the Jubilee or the passing of a millennium, but presses to be realized with greater urgency in charity towards a different future. One must be ready to pay the price of persecution because in our day the most frequent cause of martyrdom is the struggle for justice in faithfulness to the Gospel. John Paul affirms this witness: "even recently this has led to the martyrdom of some of your brothers and sisters in various parts of the world".⁷

In the Creativity of Charity

36. Throughout the centuries, works of charity have always provided the ambient for the concrete living out of the Gospel. In the practice of charity, consecrated persons have emphasized the prophetic nature of their charism and the richness of their spirituality in the Church and in the world.¹¹⁸ They recognized that

¹¹⁶ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 50.

¹¹⁷ John Paul II, *Homily* (2 February 2001): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 4 February 2001.

¹¹⁸ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 84.

they were called to be the "manifestation of God's love in the world".¹¹⁹ This dynamism must continue to be exercised with creative fidelity because it constitutes an irreplaceable resource in the Church's pastoral work. At a time when a *creativity in charity* and an authentic proof and confirmation of the charity of word and action are called for,¹²⁰ consecrated life admirably safeguards the apostolic creativity which has given rise to thousands of faces of charity and holiness in specific forms; therefore, it cannot help but feel the urgency to continue, with the Spirit's creativity, to surprise the world with new forms of effective evangelical love which respond to the needs of our time.

Consecrated life has manifested the desire to reflect upon its specific charisms and its own traditions in order to place them at the service of the new boundaries of evangelization. This means becoming one with the poor, the aged, the addicted, those suffering with AIDS, and exiled people who undergo any form of suffering because of the particular reality in which they find themselves. Attentive to the change in models, since mere assistance is no longer seen as sufficient, they seek to eradicate the causes of the needs. Poverty is caused by the ambition and indifference of many and by sinful structures which must be eliminated through a serious commitment to the field of education.

Many traditional and new foundations bring consecrated men and women to places where others usually cannot go. In recent years consecrated persons were able to leave the security of *the known* to thrust themselves into unknown places and works. Thanks to their total consecration they are in fact free to step in wherever there are critical needs. This has been witnessed in the recent foundations in new countries which present unique challenges,

Cf. *Vua Consecrate*, Title of Chapter III.

Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 50.

involving many provinces at the same time and creating international communities. With discerning eyes and generous hearts¹²¹ they have responded to the call of many who suffer in a concrete service of charity. Wherever they are, they have constituted a link between the Church and marginal groups and those not reached by ordinary pastoral ministry.

Even some charisms which seemed to have responded to times which have since passed have taken on a renewed vigour in this world which is experiencing trafficking of women and children into slavery; at the same time children, often the victims of abuse, run the risk of abandonment or conscription into armies.

Today there is a greater freedom in the exercise of the apostolates, a flourishing with greater awareness, a solidarity expressed through knowing how to stand with the people, assuming their problems, in order to respond to them, paying close attention to the signs of the times and to their needs. This multiplication of initiatives has demonstrated the importance of planning in mission if one desires to act in an ordered and efficient manner rather than haphazardly.

Announcing the Gospel

37. The first task which must be once again assumed with enthusiasm is the *proclamation of Christ to all*. This task falls especially to consecrated men and women who bring the message to the growing number of those who ignore it. This mission is still in its beginning stages and we must commit ourselves with all our resources to bring it about.¹²² The confident and mutually dependent action of missionaries must always seek better ways of

¹²¹ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 58.

¹²² Cf. John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, Rome, 7 December 1990,

responding to the demands of inculturation in such a way that the specific values of each people are not rejected but purified and brought to their fullness.¹²³ While remaining totally faithful to the proclamation of the Gospel, Christianity of the third millennium will also be characterized by the face of the many cultures and peoples where it is taken up and rooted.¹²⁴

Serving Life

38. Following a glorious tradition, a great number of consecrated persons, especially women, exercise their apostolate in health care ministries continuing Christ's mission of mercy. In the footsteps of the Divine Samaritan, they draw close to those who suffer, seeking to ease their pain. Their professional competence, attentively seeking to make the practice of medicine more human, gives space to the Gospel which enlightens even the most difficult experiences of human life and death with goodness and confidence. For this reason the poorest and most abandoned patients will be those who are the preferred recipients of their care.¹²⁵

For Christian witness to be effective, it is important, especially in delicate and controversial matters, to know how to explain the reasons for the Church's position, stressing that it is not a case of imposing on non-believers a vision based on faith, but rather of interpreting and defending the values rooted in the very nature of the human person.¹²⁶ Charity, then, especially for religious who work in this ministry, is at the service of intelligence, to ensure

¹²³ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Post-Synodal Exhortation *The Church in Asia*, New Delhi, 6 November 1999, 22.

¹²⁴ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 40.

¹²⁵ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 83.

¹²⁶ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 51.

that the fundamental principles, upon which a civilization worthy of the human person is built, are everywhere respected.

Spreading the Truth

39. The world of education also calls for the qualified presence of consecrated men and women. The mystery of the Incarnation provides the basis for an anthropology which is capable of going beyond its own limitations and contradictions to Jesus, "the new man" (*Eph* 4:24; cf. *Col* 3:10). Because the Son of God truly became man, men and women, in and through him, can truly become children of God.¹²⁷

Consecrated persons are able to develop a particularly incisive ministry in this field, thanks to their experience of the particular gifts of the Spirit, their careful listening to the Word, their constant practice of discernment and their rich heritage of pedagogical traditions amassed since the establishment of their Institutes. Equipped with this charism, consecrated persons give life to educational undertakings permeated by the Gospel spirit of freedom, justice and charity in which young people are helped to mature humanly under the action of the Spirit, while at the same time proposing sanctity as the goal of education for teachers' and students alike.¹²⁸

A renewed cultural commitment which seeks to raise the level of personal preparation and prepares for a dialogue between faith and the contemporary mentality, which fosters, an intense evangelization of culture, as service to the truth, in the academic institutions themselves,¹²⁹ must be promoted in consecrated life.

¹²⁷ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 23.

^{1a} Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 96.

¹²⁹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 98.

A presence in social communication is also needed more than ever.¹³⁰ Every effort in this new and strategic apostolic field is encouraged so that initiatives in various sectors may be better coordinated and reach higher levels of quality and effectiveness.

Openness to the Great Dialogues

40. Starting afresh from Christ means, ultimately, following him where he has made himself present in the work of salvation and living within the vast horizons opened by him. Consecrated life cannot be content living only in and for the Church. It reaches out with Christ to other Christian Churches, to other religions and to every man and woman who do not profess any religious conviction.

Consecrated life is thus called to make its specific contribution in all of the great dialogues opened to the Church by the Second Vatican Council. "Engaged in dialogue with everyone" is the significant title of the last chapter of *Vita Consecrata*, the logical conclusion to the entire Apostolic Exhortation.

41. The document recalls, above all, how the Synod on Consecrated life highlighted the close connection between consecrated life and ecumenism. "Since the soul of Ecumenism is prayer and conversion, Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life certainly have a special duty to foster this commitment".¹³¹ There is an urgent need for consecrated persons to give more space in their lives to ecumenical prayer and genuine evangelical witness so that by the power of the Holy Spirit the walls of division and prejudice can be broken down. No Institute

Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 99.
Vita Consecrata, 100.

of Consecrated Life should feel itself dispensed from working for this cause.

Speaking of various forms of ecumenical dialogue, *Vita Consecrata* points out that the sharing of *lectio divina* and taking part in common prayers in which the Lord guarantees his presence (cf. *Mt* 18:20) are ways which are particularly suitable for members of religious communities. Friendship, charity and collaboration on common initiatives of service and witness will give life to the experience of how pleasant it is where brothers and sisters dwell as one (cf. *Ps* 133 [132]). Of equal importance is the knowledge of the history, doctrine, liturgy, and charitable and apostolic works of other Christians.¹³²

42. *Vita Consecrata* poses two fundamental requirements for interreligious dialogue: Gospel witness and freedom of spirit. It also suggests some particular aids such as mutual knowledge, respect for one another, cordial friendship and reciprocal sincerity with monastic communities of other religions.¹³³

Common concern for human life ranging from compassion for those who suffer physically and spiritually to commitment to work for peace, justice and the integrity of creation provides another area for cooperation.¹³⁴ John Paul reminds us that a particular field for successful common action with people of other religious traditions is that of the search for and promotion of the dignity of women which consecrated women are called to contribute to in a special way.¹³⁵

¹³² Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 101.

¹³³ Cf. *Ecclesia in Asia*, 31, 34.

¹³⁴ Cf. *The Church in Asia*, 44.

¹³⁵ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 102.

43. Finally, the dialogue with those who do not profess any religious belief is brought to mind. Consecrated persons, by the very nature of their choice, become privileged partners in the search for God which has always stirred the human heart and has led to the different forms of asceticism and spirituality. Their sensitivity to values (cf. *Phil* 4:8) and their willingness to meet give witness to the characteristics of an authentic search for God. "For this reason", the document concludes, "consecrated persons are in duty bound to offer a geilierous welcome and spiritual support to all those who, moved by a, thirst for God and a desire to live the demands of faith, turn to them".¹³⁶

44. This dialogue necessarily opens up to the proclamation of Christ. In communion there is a mutual gifting. An authentic listening to the other provides the proper occasion to share one's own spiritual experiences and their evangelical content which nourish consecrated life. Thus we give witness to the hope that is within us (cf. *1 Peter* 3:15). We should not fear that speaking of our own faith might be seen as an offense to someone who professes a different belief. It is rather an occasion for the joyful proclamation of the gift which is for all and is offered to all with the greatest respect for each person's freedom, the gift of revelation of the God of Love who "so loved the world to give his only Son" (*Jn* 3:16).

The missionary obligation, on the other hand, does not stop us from entering into dialogue with others fully open to receive, since from among the resources and limits of every culture consecrated persons can gather the *seeds of the Word* in which they encounter precious values for their life and mission. "The Spirit of God who 'blows where he wills' (*Jn* 3:8) not infrequently

Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 103.

reveals signs of his presence which help Christ's followers to understand more deeply the message which they bear".¹³⁷

The Daily Challenges

45. It is not possible to remain indifferent to the prospect of an ecological crisis which is making vast areas of our planet inhabitable and hostile to humanity. The rich countries are consuming resources at a rate which cannot sustain the equilibrium of the system, thus causing poor countries to become even poorer. Nor can one forget the problems of peace so often threatened by the spectre of catastrophic wars.¹³⁸

Greed, the craving of pleasure, the idolatry of power, the triple concupiscence which marks history and is also at the root of present evils can only be overcome if the Gospel values of poverty, chastity and service are rediscovered.¹³⁹ Consecrated persons must know how to proclaim, with their lives and with their words, the beauty of poverty of spirit and of chastity of heart which free one for service to brothers and sisters and of obedience which gives longevity to the fruits of charity.

How can we remain passive in the face of contempt for fundamental human rights?¹⁴⁰ A special commitment must be made to certain radical aspects of the Gospel which are often less understood but which cannot, because of this, be given less importance in the Church's agenda of charity. First among these is the respect for every human life from the moment of conception to natural death.

¹³⁷ *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 56.

¹³⁸ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 51.

¹³⁹ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 88-91.

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 51.

In this openness to the world which must be ordered to Christ in such a way that all realities find their true meaning in him, consecrated lay men and women who are members of Secular Institutes hold a privileged position. Sharing the common conditions of life, they effectively work for the Kingdom of God by participating in the political and social reality bringing to them a new value, in view of their following of Christ. Precisely through their consecration lived without external signs, as lay people among lay people, they can be *salt and light* even in those situations in which a visible sign of consecration would be rejected or serve as an impediment.

Looking Forward and Beyond

46. "Sentinels of the Dawn": young men and women are also found among consecrated persons.¹⁴¹ We truly need courageous young people who, allowing themselves to be configured by the Father with the work of the Spirit and becoming "persons conformed to Christ",¹⁴² offer to all a joyful and transparent witness of their "specific acceptance of the mystery of Christ"¹⁴³ and of the particular spirituality of their own Institute.¹⁴⁴

May they therefore be seen more decisively as protagonists of their own formation.¹⁴⁵ Since, for generational motives, they will have to carry on the renewal of their own institutes, it is fitting that - following an adequate preparation - they gradually assume guiding and governing tasks. Strengthened by their spark of

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 9.

¹⁴² *Vita Consecrata*, 19.

¹⁴³ *Vita Consecrata*, 16.

¹⁴⁴ Cf. *Vita Consecrata*, 93.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, *Potissimum Institutione* Rome, 2 February 1990, 29.

idealism they become true witnesses to the striving for holiness, to the *high standard* of Christian living.¹⁴⁶ The future of consecrated life and its mission rests in a large part on the strength of their faith, on the attitudes which they have joyfully manifested and on what the Spirit wishes to tell them.

Let us look upon Mary, Mother and Teacher of all. She, the first consecrated person, lived the fullness of charity. Fervent in the Spirit, she served the Lord, joyful in hope, strong in trial, persevering in prayer; she intercedes for us (cf. *Rom* 12:11-13). She reflects all the aspects of the Gospel; all the charisms of consecrated life are mirrored and renewed in her. She supports us in our daily commitments, making them a splendid witness of love in accord with the invitation of St. Paul: "Live a life worthy of the calling you have received!" (*Eph* 4:1).

We once again turn to the words of John Paul II to confirm these orientations, because in them we find the encouragement and confidence which we all need to face the task which seems beyond our strength: "A new century, a new millennium are opening in the light of Christ. But not everyone can see this light. Ours is the wonderful and demanding task of becoming its 'reflection'... This is a daunting task if we consider our human weakness, which so often renders us opaque and full of shadows. But it is a task which we can accomplish if we turn to the light of Christ and open ourselves to the grace which makes us a new creation".¹⁴⁷ This is the hope proclaimed in the Church by consecrated men and women as through the centuries, with their brothers and sisters, they encounter the Risen Christ.

Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 31.

Cf. *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 54.

Cases & Inquiries

JAVIER GONZALEZ, OP

LEGITIMATE DEPARTURE FROM A RELIGIOUS INSTITUTE

In what instances may a religious legitimately depart from his or her institute? Can physical or mental illness constitute a cause for the exclusion of a member from renewal/perpetual profession? Is there any difference between an indult of exclaustation and an indult to leave the institute? What are the causes and the procedure to obtain an indult to leave the institute while in temporal or perpetual vows? What are the effects of an indult to leave a religious institute? What if a member rejects the indult in the process of notification and then changes his or her mind, or vice versa? What if at the time of notification the religious refuses to accept the indult to leave the institute, but the institute is not ready to retain him or her as member any more? Does an indult to leave the institute free a religious who is a cleric from the obligation he assumed at ordination? What will be the status of a "secularized" religious cleric who cannot find any Bishop willing to incardinate him to his diocese? Can a religious who after profession has legitimately left the institute be readmitted to

the same or to another institute? Would a readmitted member have to repeat the novitiate? What will be the nature of probation prior to temporary profession, and the length of time in temporal vows before perpetual profession?

* * *

To provide an answer to these and other questions related to the so-called legitimate departure from a religious institute, a systematic development of the topic is needed, mainly from a canonical point of view. This is what we are going to do in the following pages.

To begin with, let us say that, in addition to the case of *exclaustration* [see previous issue of *Boletín Eclesiástico de Filipinos*] by virtue of which a religious is temporarily allowed to live outside a house of his or her institute, the legitimate departure from a religious institute may take place in any of the following instances:

(1) By voluntary departure on completion of the time of temporary profession;

(2) By exclusion from making further profession on the completion of temporary profession; and

(3) By an indulgence to leave the institute granted upon request by the competent ecclesiastical authority to those either in temporal or in perpetual vows.

Let us have a close look at each one of them, adding also at the end something about the possibility and conditions of re-admission of those who have previously left the institute.

1. Voluntary leaving on completion of the time of temporary profession

"A person who, on completion of the time of temporary profession, wishes to leave the institute, is free to do so," states canon 688 §1. This provision reflects the probationary nature of temporary profession. With the termination of this period of time the religious is free to leave the institute, and all rights and obligations assumed at temporary profession cease.

Freedom to depart at the completion of the time of temporary profession is recognized both legally and morally. The Church does not impose religious life on anyone; neither does she force anyone to remain in it. Thus at the end of the period of temporary profession, unless further profession is freely requested and granted, all rights and obligations entailed by profession cease and the will and cession of administrative documents and dowry (if any) are returned to the person departing.

Can the former religious claim remuneration for any works while a member of the institute? Juridically speaking, no, as it is expressly stated in the Code of Canon Law: "Those who have legitimately left a religious institute... can request nothing from it for any work done in it" (c.702 §1). However, the same canonical provision adds that "the institute is to observe *equity* and *evangelical charity* toward the member who is separated from it" (§2).

2. Departure by exclusion from the perpetual profession

At the end of the period of temporary profession, the Superiors of the institute are to make a judgment on the suitability of those who ask for further profession. Superiors are not bound to admit to perpetual profession those candidates who have not shown to have the necessary qualities to become full members of the institute. In the same way the members are free to leave the

institute upon expiration of temporary profession, so the competent major Superior (i.e., the one designated by proper law), for a just cause and after hearing the council, can exclude a member in temporary profession from making subsequent profession.

This is clearly expressed in canon 689 §1: *"The competent major Superior, after consulting his or her council, can for just reasons exclude a member from making further profession on the completion of temporary profession."*

It is then up to the major Superior, after having *heard* the opinion of his or her council, to decide. Obviously, Superiors and their councils cannot whimsically exclude a member from perpetual profession, which in some cases could be an "unjust" exclusion. The canonical provision states that there must be "just reasons" for it.

What can be considered "just reasons" to exclude a member from further profession? A clue to answer is provided by canon 642: *"Superiors are to exercise a vigilant care to admit only those who, besides being of required age, are healthy, have a suitable disposition, and have sufficient maturity to undertake the life which is proper to the institute."* Thus, apparent lack of vocation, physical or psychological illness, unsuitability for the life and/or for the works of the particular institute, responsibility for serious disharmony in community living, indecisiveness or failure to apply for further profession, etc., are some sufficiently just reasons warranting such action.

What about *illness* and/or *insanity* as causes for exclusion from perpetual profession? This point deserves special attention for there are some technicalities involved.

(a) *Illness as cause for exclusion from renewal/perpetual profession*

If physical or mental illness -also if contracted during the period of temporary profession- renders the candidate unfit for the life of the institute, it is sufficient cause to exclude the member from renewal of profession or from the perpetual profession in the institute. The decision to refuse profession belongs to the competent major Superior above mentioned.

Three important conditions, however, must be taken into account on this regard, namely, that the illness has rendered the member unfit for the life of the institute; that the assistance of experts (e.g. doctors, psychiatrists, psychologist) has been sought, and that the institute has not been the cause of such contracted illness. These are the precise words of the canonical provision: *"Even though contracted after profession, a physical or psychological infirmity which, in the judgment of experts, renders the member unsuited to lead a life in the institute, constitutes a reason for not admitting the member to renewal of profession or to perpetual profession, unless the infirmity was contracted through the negligence of the institute or because of work performed in the institute"* (c. 689 § 2).

The last clause is important for it contains a twofold exception: (a) if the illness was the result of negligence by the institute, e.g. a negligent failure to obtain proper assistance when the symptoms were first manifest; and (b) if the illness was the direct and established consequence of work carried out by the religious or by direction of the institute, e.g. egg-fever contracted by a missionary working in tropical zones. The fact that a member cannot be excluded from profession on these instances is not a concession of canon law, but rather a demand of natural law.

The Code makes clear that the clause regarding the cause of the infirmity is invalidating, meaning that such exclusion when either of the causes mentioned is present would be null and void. Thus, in utilizing this exclusion, the burden of proof rests with the institute. Non-negligence, such as provision for ordinarily available medical services for known and treatable illnesses in their incipient stages and with appropriate follow-through, would have to be documented by the institute. If work done in the institute may be related to the reasons for the illness leading to exclusion, the etiology of the illness would have to be ascertained and would have to date from before first profession in the institute.

An obvious observation is the fact that one does not need the same degree of physical or psychological health to remain in an institute dedicated to intellectual life, for instance, or in the missions among lepers; in an institute of austere life or in another of much "softer" life-style. That is why one of the elements Superiors are to consider in accepting members into their institute, is that they have "sufficient maturity to undertake *the life which is proper to the institute.*"

In any case, there remains a distinct obligation on the Superior to take appropriate account of *natural justice*, of *equity* and of *the demands of Christian charity*. Ultimately it is up to the major Superior to determine when the cause for exclusion from further profession is just. The law does not require in this case that the Superior have the *consent* of his or her council; the latter must only be heard (seeking its opinion, consultative vote). What is always clear is that such final decision is to be undertaken *with equity and charity*, and the members should be apprised of the reasons for exclusion from subsequent profession.

(b) *Insanity*

A religious who becomes insane during the period of temporary vows cannot be dismissed from the institute, even though unable to make a new profession (c. 689 § 3).

It has always been the concern of the Church defending the weakest, especially the insane. The present canonical provision could be a good example of it: the person who becomes insane while under temporary profession is incapable of making further profession (cf. c.99), yet he or she cannot be dismissed from the institute. The religious remains in the state he or she was at the onset of the illness, that is, a temporarily professed member of the institute. The institute, on its part, has the obligation to care for that member in the most appropriate way, though not necessarily within a community if the good of the member and the safety of the community should require otherwise (cf. c. 665 § 1).

This case of insanity is not the same thing as the psychical illness contemplated in the previous letter (a). Insanity is always a psychical illness, but not all psychical illnesses constitute insanity. Determining whether an illness is really insanity, and whether it has been contracted during the period of temporal vows, belongs to legal medicine.

3. Indult to leave the institute

The indult of departure from a religious institute after perpetual profession was formerly called an indult of secularization. Such expression, given its long tradition in the Church, is still found today in some books, in spite that the present Code of Canon Law calls it "indult to leave the institute" (cf. cc.688-693).

The indult to leave the institute, contrary to the indult of exclaustation, brings about the *definitive rupture* of the religious with his/her institute; a rupture that may take place either during the temporary profession period (temporal vows) or after the perpetual profession (perpetual vows). In each case the reasons for the departure differ as well as the canonical procedures involved.

(a) *During temporal vows*

A religious in temporary vows is already incorporated into the institute, although not definitively. The obligation to live the vows according to the law of the institute for a prescribed period of time is a serious responsibility, and a religious should not request to leave the institute before the temporary profession has expired without a grave cause.

Extreme difficulty with the obligations of religious life, serious family problems or obligations, unsuitability, and failure to adapt to the works of the institute could be sufficiently grave causes or reasons to prompt this request. In addition, a certain element of *urgency* must also be present, in the sense that the decision cannot be deferred either by the member or by the institute until the period of temporary vows has expired.

The temporary professed member wishing to leave or to be dispensed from the obligations of profession must submit a petition to the supreme Moderator of the institute, indicating briefly the reasons for the request. If the institute is of pontifical right, the supreme Moderator, with the consent of his or her council, grants the indult. If the applicant belongs to an institute of diocesan right or to an autonomous monastery (c. 615), it is also the supreme Moderator the one who grants the indult, but a further element is required for its validity, namely, the indult's confirmation by the local diocesan Bishop of the religious, i.e. the bishop of the diocese in which is located the religious house to which the member is assigned.

An indult to leave the institute which is lawfully granted and notified to the member carries with it a dispensation from the vows and from all obligations arising from profession (cf. c.692).

Ordinarily such indult is communicated by the granting competent authority to the petitioner through his/her major Superior, who must make sure that the member understands the contents and significance of the indult. If the religious accepts the indult, the departure takes place immediately; if the religious refuses the indult at the time of notification, the indult is rendered ineffective; finally, if the religious neither accepts nor refuses the indult, after ten useful days from the moment he or she received the news of the concession, the rescript becomes ineffective: the indult is void and a new one must be petitioned if the member decides later to depart. At any instance, whether the indult is accepted or refused, a copy of the rescript with the signature of the petitioner or a note of the refusal should be kept in the files of the institute.

(b) *During perpetual vows*

Perpetual profession in a religious institute involves a lifelong commitment of the individual to a particular way of life within the institute. A request to leave the institute after perpetual profession can only be regarded as very exceptional. The law permits such a request to be made but only *"for the gravest of reasons, weighed before the Lord"* (c. 691 § 1).

In saying that the religious must consider the causes "before the Lord" the supreme legislator of the Church is appealing to the religious' conscience. Religious life is something very important in the divine plan, with which we should not play. Yet, nor even God or the Church do force anyone to either enter religious life or to remain in it.

The causes to leave the institute must be "very grave." A purely subjective judgment by an individual is not sufficient: there must be a distinct effort on the part of the competent Superior to discern whether or not the alleged reasons have a foundation in objective reality.

The canonical provisions do not offer a ready-made list of such "gravest reasons" that might justify the concession of an indult to leave the institute once in perpetual vows. Authors enumerate, among others, the following: conviction that one has lost the vocation and can no longer live the life with integrity; genuine inability to observe the obligations of religious life; grave familial obligations resulting from sickness or death which cannot be adequately responded to within the institute; the life-style of the member is no longer congruent with the nature and end of the institute; or a vocation to the priesthood in a lay institute...

These and other similar causes do not actually grant any right to the individual confronted with the radical commitment assumed through the perpetual profession. They only grant *a solidly founded option for a humble request*, as foreseen by the legislator in the Code of Canon Law, that must be evaluated -accepted or rejected- by the competent ecclesiastical authority.

The member should weigh the decision in prayer and seek the advice and direction of experienced persons. It is wise to petition for a period of exclaustation before coming to a final decision.

In order to obtain the indult of secularization of a *perpetually professed* religious, the procedure is the following:

1. The concerned member addresses his or her petition weighed in prayer and "before the Lord"- to the Apostolic See.

2. The same member presents his/her petition to the competent major Superior of the institute [the supreme Moderator or the Provincial], containing the required specific data.
3. The Superior, having studied the case, seeks also the opinion [not necessarily the consent] of his or her council.
4. With the opinion of his/her council (and other professional opinions if they have been sought), the religious Superior sends the petition of the member with a personal supporting statement and the necessary documentation to the Apostolic See or, in the case of institutes of diocesan right, to the Bishop of the diocese in which the house where the religious resides is located, for a decision.
5. The Apostolic See or the diocesan Bishop either grants or refuses the indult (they may also ask for additional documentation...) and responds to the petition in the form of a written reply or rescript, sending it back to the major Superior of the petitioner.
6. The religious Superior communicates the final rescript to the petitioner, who in turn may either accept or refuse it.

These steps are succinctly mentioned in canon 691, which reads as follows:

"A perpetually professed religious is not to seek an indult to leave the institute, except for the gravest of reasons, weighed before the Lord. The petition is to be presented to the supreme Moderator of the institute, who will forward it to the competent authority with his or her own opinion and that of the council" (§1).

"In institutes of pontifical right this indult is reserved to the Apostolic See. In institutes of diocesan right the indult can be

granted by the Bishop in whose diocese is located the house to which the religious is assigned" (§2).

Concerning the *effects* of the indult, what was already said before will have to be repeated here, quoting canon 692: "An indult to leave the institute which is lawfully granted and notified to the member, by virtue of the law itself carries with it, unless it has been rejected by the member in the act of notification, a *dispensation from the vows and from all obligations [and rights] arising from profession.*" (One consequence of such dispensation is the cessation of the matrimonial diriment impediment of public perpetual vow of chastity in a religious institute, reserved to the Apostolic See if the institute in question is of pontifical right.)

It is worth repeating that for the effectivity of the indult, it has to be not only granted, but also *notified*. The notification is made in the presence of witnesses. If the religious accepts the indult, he or she signs it in their presence. If, on the contrary, the religious refuses the indult at the time of notification, the indult is rendered inoperative and a new one must be petitioned if the member decides later to depart: the rescript should be returned to the Apostolic See or to the diocesan bishop with a notation of the petitioner's refusal. In any case, whether the indult is accepted or refused, a copy of the rescript with the signature of the petitioner or a note of the refusal should be kept in the personnel file of the institute.

Some related questions that may belong to casuistry:

What if the religious Superior will not process the petition of his or her subject as required by law? The member could have recourse to the next higher authority with an indication of his/her Superior's unwillingness to process the request in the prescribed manner.

What if the competent authority denies the petition for an indult to leave the institute because the religious Superior simply disapproves of the request? I guess then the matter should be dealt with by the member in direct consultation with his or her Superior and the council's opinion. Should the parties to the misunderstanding become intransigent, the matter should be referred to the Sacred Congregation.

What if a member rejects the indult in the process of notification and then changes his or her mind, or vice versa? It has been said already that rejection of the indult upon notification renders it inoperative. Once the rescript has been rejected, the member should resubmit the request if he or she has a change of mind. The opposite is also true: If the rescript has been accepted with the legal consequences and subsequently the member changes his or her mind wishing to remain in the institute, such change does not prevent the legal consequences of the completed juridical act.

What if at the time of notification the religious refuses to accept the indult to leave the institute, but the institute is not ready to retain him or her as member any more? **Well, then the remaining** solution is the recourse of asking the Apostolic See to impose the "secularization" on him or her. However, the Apostolic See will not act on the matter unless she knows with certainty the reasons of the institute and those alleged as defense by the accused religious. The reason is obvious: such imposed "secularization" would be tantamount to expulsion or dismissal from the institute.

(c) *The religious cleric*

The indult to leave the institute does not free a religious who is a cleric from the obligation he assumed at ordination. That is why *"if the member is a cleric, the indult is not granted until he has found a Bishop who will incardinate him in his diocese,*

or at least receive him there on probation. If he is received on probation, he is by virtue of the law itself incardinated in the diocese after five years, unless the Bishop has rejected him" (can. 693).

The last sentence ["...he is by virtue of the law itself incardinated in the diocese after five years, unless the Bishop has rejected him"] contains a reminder to the unaware benevolent Bishop: after five years on probation in his diocese, the law incardicates the cleric *ipso facto*, unless the Bishop has rejected him in time. Therefore, the Bishop is to decide on what to do with the religious cleric on probation (whether accepting him or not) before the five year probation period expires.

In effect, while on probation, the indulted cleric does not belong *pleno jure* to the diocese. He will have to wait for five years in order to become, by automatic operation of the law itself, incardinated to the diocese... provided the Bishop has stated before the expiry of that time that he does not wish such an incardination to take place.

What will happen then to the cleric if there is such refusal on the part of the Bishop, knowing that "acephalous or 'wandering' clergy are by no means to be allowed" (c.265)? Some authors think that while the cleric is in a diocese on probation, he *remains incardinated in his religious institute, even though effectively dispensed from the obligations of profession*. Personally, I do not agree with it. My opinion is that if the five year probation period has passed and the Bishop has decided not to incardinate him in his diocese, the cleric himself must find a solution to his status in the Church, that is, he must look for another benevolent Bishop willing to welcome him to his diocese. The reason is because once the cleric has, upon notification, accepted the indult to leave the institute, *he is not a religious any more*. The text of the canon

says it clearly: "the indult is not granted until he has found a Bishop who will incardinate him in his diocese *or at least receive him there on probation.*" The indult, therefore, is granted with all the effects, once a Bishop has received the cleric on probation.

To avoid this awkward situation the cleric, even upon recommendation of his Superiors, should have normally asked first for a period of exlaustration instead of an indult to definitively leave the institute. Actually it seems to be the practice of the Apostolic See to grant the cleric an indult of exlaustration for the duration of the time of conditional acceptance, at the end of which or before that time, the receiving bishop is usually granted the faculty of issuing the indult of departure which simultaneously incardicates the cleric into his diocese (CLD 4:244).

4, Readmission after Profession: Special Questions

Readmission to a religious institute, the same one to which a person formerly belonged or to another, is possible but entails different procedures depending on the type of departure and the institutes involved.

Can a religious who after profession has legitimately left the institute be readmitted to the same institute? Yes, a religious who has legitimately left the institute after profession can be readmitted. Voluntary departure at the completion of the time of temporary profession; departure as a result of exclusion from making a subsequent profession by the competent major Superior; and departure as a result of an indult to leave the institute requested voluntarily by the member concerned (whether in temporal or perpetual vows) are legitimate departures that in principle would qualify for readmission, according to canon 690. Another story will be whether or not a person who has legitimately departed in these various categories will actually be admitted again to the institute,

for it depends on the type of departure, the present condition of the person involved, and the judgment of the competent authority of the institute.

Would a readmitted person have to repeat the novitiate? The answer is "no." Canon 690 states that "A person that lawfully leaves the institute after completing the novitiate or after profession can be readmitted by the supreme Moderator, *without the obligation of repeating the novitiate.*" Instead, what in such case is required is a "suitable probationary period" before temporary profession and a time in such vows prior to perpetual profession. But, what about if the supreme Moderator requires the repetition of the novitiate as the suitable probation? Well, it could be, but the intention of the Church on this matter, as reflected in her legislation, is that the supreme Moderator may judge a new novitiate as not necessary upon reentrance.

Who will determine the time and manner of probation, and the duration of temporary profession for those readmitted? Such determinations belong to the same major Superior who readmitted them. The duration of temporary profession must follow the general law minimum and maximum [no less than three years nor more than six (cf. c.655), although in exceptional circumstances it may be extended to nine years (cf. c.657)], whereas those readmitted after having been in temporary profession are required a minimum of one year temporary profession or the time that had remained at the time of their departure. This phase ends with the admission to perpetual profession in accordance with the proper law.

What if someone who has legitimately left an institute after profession (temporal or perpetual), wishes to be admitted to another institute different from the original one? He or she must follow the procedure of universal and proper law for initial admission to the institute. It should be noticed that canon law (c. 643, § 1, 5^o) invalidates such admission to a new novitiate if the previous admission has been concealed by the former religious.

GOD'S WORD FOR TOMORROW

Homilies for January-February 2003

MARIO BALTAZAR, OP

January 5, 2003

Feast of Epiphany

Cycle B

(Readings: Is 60:1-6/Eph 3:2-3, 5-6 / Mt 2:1-12)

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, the popular and official names given to the feast we are celebrating today, can increase our understanding of the faith and the role we are supposed to play as Christians.

What are the popular names? They are various and they originated from the perceptive interpretation of the people. Hence, the term "popular". Some of the names are: Feast of the Three Kings, Feast of the Magi, and Feast of the three Wise Men.

They are all acceptable titles and leave foundation on the data supplied by Matthew's story you have listened to in the third

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

reading. Therefore, those visitors from the East are at the same time kings, Magi and Wise Men who, guided by a star, came to worship the baby born to be the King of the Jews.

The lesson we can draw from these popular designations of today's feast is that all dignities, ranks, authorities, wisdom and knowledge, in whatever place and degree we exercise them, should acknowledge and serve the only true King and Messiah, which is Jesus Christ.

The popular titles, however attractive and exciting they may sound, have the inconvenience that they may carry us too far in paying more attention to the personalities of the Three Kings rather than to the person of Jesus. We ask what their names were, whether they rode in camels or horses, how they were dressed, which was their country and so forth.

Hence, an official title of the feast, originating from the teaching authority of the Church, is needed to create a balance. And the official title is the Epiphany of the Lord.

The word is unexciting and strange to many of you, but translated, it simply means the Revelation of the Lord. The assumption is that the Lord or some aspect of Himself is hidden from us and it takes a revelation to bring to evidence that which is hidden.

So, thanks to its official title, today's feast focuses our attention upon God. He is hidden or some aspects of Him. Our curiosity is aroused. Our attention is called. Fortunately, there is a revelation, an epiphany that brings to evidence the hidden thing about God.

Mother Church facilitates the revelation by bringing to our consideration the three bible readings of today's feast. Paul, in Ephesians 3 (the second reading) is particularly instructive.

He admits that there existed a secret, a hidden truth from the beginning of human history, in fact, from all eternity, and it was only in Paul's time or thereabouts that the secret, the hidden truth, was brought to light. What really overwhelmed Paul was the realization that God chose him to reveal and make known this secret.

What was this secret, this hidden truth? It was God's plan of salvation, initially promised to the Hebrew race, but which Jews and Gentiles equally are to participate and share in. In other words, no one, whatever is her color, race, status and background, is excluded from God's plan to save all human beings.

Today's three bible readings affirm the universality of salvation from God by stating that Jews and Gentiles (an old distinction that comprises all humanity) will be reconciled and saved under the one kingship of Jesus. If that distinction does not suffice, we have another (the poor and the rich) which while comprising today all of humanity, has also a basis on biblical data.

The shepherds of Bethlehem were poor people. The kings from the East were rich people. Both shepherds and kings acknowledge and worshipped Jesus. So, whether poor or rich, we all are included in God's plan of salvation. Our role is to share this discovered truth with our poor and rich brethren, just as the shepherds and the Three Kings had done in their time.

But above all, we must assure ourselves that we, too, participate and share in God's salvation by surrendering, in spirit and in truth, all that we are and have, to his Son, the Messiah and the Christ. That was the very thing that the Three Wise Men did when they offered their gifts, and adored Jesus after finding him.

January 12, 2003

Baptism of the Lord

Cycle B

(Readings: Is 42:1-4, 6-7/Acts 10:34-38/Mk 1:7-11)

Today's celebration of the Lord's baptism affords us a timely occasion to talk about and reflect upon the sacrament of baptism that all of us have received once upon a time and that our children in the future will go on receiving. More importantly today's feast invites us to contemplate the author and source of our individual baptisms - Jesus Christ our Lord who himself submitted to the baptism performed by John.

John had been baptizing crowds of sinners, exhorting them towards repentance and change of life. In asking to be baptized also, Jesus accomplishes two things: 1) he accepts and inaugurates his mission as the Suffering Servant of God, obedient to the will of the Father even unto death on the cross for the salvation of all mankind; 2) he throws light upon the significance and value of the sacrament of baptism he will institute for Christians.

A. Christ's baptism in the Jordan river, the heavens opened, the Holy Spirit came down upon him like a dove, and the Father spoke saying, "You are my own dear Son, I am pleased with you." All this was in response to the humility and self-abasement Jesus showed in undergoing the ritual of baptism and purification designed only for repenting sinners.

What are the effects of the sacrament of baptism for us Christians, apart from those we do not expect to happen to us like seeing the heavens open, a dove resting on our heads, a voice like thunder from above? Today's three bible readings concur in mentioning the giving of the Holy Spirit and the conferring of the privilege of adoptive sonship as among the wonderful effects

of baptism for the Christians. To say it in a few words, baptism enables us to partake of God's life. We become "new" creatures. Our "newness" consists in this, that aside from possessing a natural life we also possess a divine life.

Life manifests itself in activities. Natural activities are manifestations of natural life. They can be good but they also can be bad. Divine life, in shared or pure form, manifests itself in activities that are always good. Do baptized persons engage in activities that are always good? Experience indicates many times the opposite: that one travels a long distance between his good intention and his good deed. Oftentimes one does not even reach the other end but makes a detour to wrong actions.

But the power to do good still remains in us because of the Holy Spirit given in baptism. We are truly God's children because of baptism, although at times we behave like renegade children of God. The question therefore, is not whether baptism is an ineffectual sacrament, but whether we are activating our baptismal powers. God is not an Indian giver. He does not repent of his gifts nor claim their return, not even the title of sonship.

We are supposed to build upon the foundations God laid down for us at baptism. We are expected to live fully our lives as baptized people, in faith, hope, love, prayer and sacrifice. Baptism is not a medal to showcase, not a trophy to mount on a shelf, not a certificate to hang on a frame. All these turn gray and rusty. Baptism is a life, a new life in the image of God, a life to be nurtured by us, strengthened and perfected with the help and power of the Holy Spirit. Baptism therefore is not a one-time and get-it-over event, but a life that has a capacity for growth, development and self-expression. It is a unique life-style, a distinguished self-expression by which the baptized person lives out the life he shares with God.

January 19, 2003
Feast of Sto. Nino

Cycle B

(Readings: Is 9:1-6/Eph 1:3-6, 15-18/Mk 10: 13-16)

Christmas has been, for most people, such a beautiful and joyous experience that the question remains in the consciousness of everyone, "Why can't we have a Christmas every day of the year?" Actually, this is not wishful thinking. The Baby Jesus has not disappeared from our lives. As a matter of fact, with today's feast of the Sto. Nino, we are privileged to touch with our faith a growing-up person, the Boy Jesus. More so, with today's gospel, we hear the Adult Jesus speaking on the value and virtue of childhood of everyone, his childhood, your childhood and my childhood.

So, it may not be Christmas everyday and forever, but it is the same Christ, yesterday, today and forever (to use Paul's expression) that we touch with our faith. His infancy, his boyhood, his teen-age years, his adulthood are all accessible for our observation through the eyes of faith. We have ample data furnished by the bible to feed our faith with the solid food of eternal verities. Although the events of Bethlehem, Jerusalem, Nazareth, Galilee took place in the past, their memories endure, their impact ever is recurring, their results continue forever because Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, now and forever.

Let us now focus on the religious significance of childhood. Today's feast invites us to do that. There is nothing so lovable, I believe, in all creation than a little child. Looking at a child, any child, one is convinced of the existence of the unseen God. By holding the hands or fingers of a child, one can feel the providence of the invisible God who rules the forces of the universe and guides the destinies of men and women.

Hence, we consider it some kind of sacrilege to subject children to starvation, prostitution, exploitation, manipulation, sex-crimes, and corruption presently being done in massive scale according to reports from the four corners of the globe, including this corner of our own country. Such practices are a profanation of the image of God in those children.

In today's Gospel, Jesus sounds a warning not to despise children nor cause them to lose faith in him. Their guardian angels are always in the presence of the heavenly Father. Jesus himself felt attracted towards the children, embraced and blessed them, and proclaimed that children are the rightful heirs and citizens of the Kingdom of heaven. Little boys and little girls, listen to this. Jesus has made heaven for your inheritance. You are the rightful owners of the heavenly kingdom. If you ask why, it is because Jesus loves you. And he would not permit anybody else to enter heaven, your home and his home, unless they are like you - humble, trusting, simple and obedient.

So, little children, you hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Tell your elders, your parents, all the grown-ups, all the important people (the VIPs); tell the whole world to imitate your humility, your trustfulness, your simplicity and obedience so that you can open the gates of heaven for them. Pray for them so that they may have the courage to change and become like you.

To the rest of you, dear brothers and sisters, the grown-ups, the adults and the elderlies, this we say. This teaching is directed to all of us. The kingdom of God belongs only to such as this little one. Unless we change and become like the little child Jesus was holding in his hands - become humble, trusting, obedient before God - we cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Today's feast of Sto. Nino invites us in faith to contemplate the face, the smile, the enduring posture not anymore of any child

resting on the embrace of a grown-up, but the face, the smile, the posture of the Boy Jesus himself, the Sto. Nino. We must celebrate together with the prophet Isaiah (first reading) the fact that "a child is born to us; a son is given to us." And with Paul (second reading), let us "praise and give thanks to God for giving us every spiritual blessing in the heavenly world through Christ and in union with Christ."

Lord Jesus, help us to imitate the virtues of your holy childhood so that we too, along with all the children, can inherit your kingdom and share in your happiness.

January 26, 2003

Third Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B

(Readings: Jon 3: 1-5,10/1 Cor 7: 29-31/Mk 1: 14-20)

Everybody loves to experience a good adventure. At least, everybody enjoys reading a good adventure story where he/she can identify with the hero/heroine. What makes a good adventure is the element of suspense and surprise. You never know what's coming next; or if you thought you knew, it turns out different from what you expected.

Today's first bible reading is one such stuff. It is a suspenseful story of, an adventure experienced by the prophet Jonah, and whose every turn of the page is full of surprises. Incidentally, if you care to read the book of Jonah, whence our selected verses are taken, you can do it in ten minutes for it's composed of only four chapters. But to use an expression from the book itself, it contains a. whaleful of suspense, twists and surprises.

In fact, all three readings of today's Mass invite us to embark on an adventure that will take us to uncharted and untried

highways and byways. But like Jonah, we hope to end up safely and happy, perhaps even wiser and humbler than he because God is behind this invitation for adventure. This is how the story of Jonah goes. He was commanded by God to go east to Nineveh to preach repentance to the Assyrians of that great capital. Instead, he went west to Spain hoping that the mortal enemies of his people may not have the chance of hearing his message of repentance.

He accordingly rides on a boat to get away from the task God has given him. But a mysterious typhoon overtakes the boat and the crew cast Jonah overboard believing him to be the reason why they were experiencing danger. Jonah does not perish however. A big whale swallows him and it swam across the Mediterranean and Persian seas, and spits him out right on the beach of Assyria.

God again commanded him to preach repentance to the Ninevites. Grown wiser this time from his eventful adventure, Jonah obeyed and preached repentance. The Ninevites welcome his message, mended their ways, and God does not execute his threat of punishment.

In the third reading (Mark 1) Jesus invites two pairs of fishermen-brothers to join him in his adventure of catching souls and preaching the good news of God's kingdom. A scenario of purest adventure was no doubt being offered to the two pairs of brothers; Simon and Andrew, James and John. Jesus was at that time practically a complete stranger to them. Yet at his invitation, they left everything, boats, nets, profits, parents, relatives to follow someone whose livelihood was more precarious than that of the birds of the air and foxes of the woods.

Apart from the invitation to follow Jesus, they knew nothing that will happen next, or what destiny awaits them. They left all that in the hands of the great Adventurer Jesus Christ. It must

have taken them great courage to go on this kind of journey towards the unknown and untried.

In the second reading (1 Cor 7), Paul holds up to us the prospect of yet another adventure, away from the present form of this world to a future form which it is not possible to figure out now. Adventures of this kind are good for the young and stout of heart. But how about us who have grown old and over-cautious? Are we still fit for adventures? Yes, Christianity is a challenge for all to become adventurers and explorers because in it, there is so much yet unknown and untried.

But of course, nobody can understand this language and much less take up the challenge being offered unless he/she has the mind and the heart of a reconstructed Jonah, of the fishermen-brothers, of the Apostle Paul. They are presented to us today so that we may be inspired by their example and cast our fortunes with our Lord and his kingdom.

February 2, 2003

Presentation of the Lord

Cycle B

(Readings: Mai 3:1-4/Heb 2: 14-18/Lk 2:22-40)

Assiduous readers of the bible and scriptures experts have tagged different labels on Luke. He is a sharp historian, some say. He is a skillful writer, at home with both the Greek Septuagint and the Greek "lingua franca". He is a self-effacing travel-companion. He is a painter with delicate taste. He is a perceptive psychologist of human behavior, and so on. But the best label, in my opinion, for St. Luke is what the church has affixed on him - Luke the Evangelist. Born and raised in a Christian community within Hellenistic territory, Luke learned the Good News about Jesus Christ. Now he wants to share this Good News

as he understood it and discovered for himself with fellow-believers all over the Hellenistic world under Roman domination. Luke wanted the Gentile-Christians to be thoroughly convinced and firmly assured of the realities that their faith has placed them in contact with. So he composes a two-volume evangile or Good News: the Gospel and the Acts of Apostles.

It is against this background that we should read and interpret today's gospel passage. Among the four evangelists, only Luke recorded the event of the Presentation of the Christ-Child at the temple. Why has Luke taken the trouble of narrating to Gentile-Christians a story about a ritual practiced only by Jews in the Temple they never saw, dictated by a law whose foundational precedent was difficult for them to understand? The event of Presentation would have a better place in Matthew's or John's gospel, who wrote for or on behalf of Jewish-Christian communities. Yet it had to be St. Luke to report to us this story. Why?

We did not mention explicitly that Luke was also a theologian. To be sure, all four evangelists are theologians; in fact, all inspired writers of the Old Testament and New Testament are theologians with their distinctive theologies, from each of which we can learn a great deal about God. After all, is not theology a discourse about God? If it will be about something else, to the exclusion of God, then it is not theology.

As a theologian, Luke has his set of favorite themes, to mention but a few, the Law of God, the Temple of God, the Promises and Prophecies from God. Law, Temple, Promises and Prophecies. You might get the impression that Luke was a Jewish rabbi for liking these themes. He really loves them, but it is to show that God had joined the Gentiles to his chosen people so that all may share of his love and goodness.

So Luke thought that the story of the Presentation could be just right to make that point. The theme on the Law highlights the sovereign will of God and the paramount duty of the creatures to obey it. God has commanded the Hebrews to consecrate and present to him all first-born males in recognition of the signal favor he gave them by sparing the lives of their first-born but not those of the Egyptians. Therefore Mary and Joseph presented to God their first-born. Obedience to God is a duty for all, not only for the Hebrews, as implied by Luke in his story.

This goes true with the other themes. Take, for example, the Temple. God had commanded it to be built where he is to be worshipped alone in the manner he ordains. To worship God alone is a duty for all, and not the Hebrews only. Do we worship God alone? Do we not worship other things along with him? Jesus will say later on, "You cannot worship God and mammon." Why did he say that? Because there were people trying to do the impossible thing. Then there is a ring of universalism in the prophecy of the Spirit-filled old man Simeon when he declared that the Christ-Child is a revealing light for the Gentiles, as well as the glory of Israel. Hence, God's promised word has been fulfilled.

From this point on, Luke has set the background for the mystery of the Presentation to take place. Law, Temple, Prophecies, and Promises provide the background against which we clearly see the Christ-Child going to the Temple, not so much as a first-born offering as the Lord taking possession of his temple and receiving the homage there of Jews and Gentiles alike. From them, the Lord will form a new people, to whom he will give a new Law, and with whom he will strike a new covenant that will include the promise of his Father's kingdom.

The oracle of the prophet Malachi, which our first reading today reproduces, can be considered as a musical background to the Lucan story and drama of the Presentation of our Lord. For in it, we have these words, "Suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek." People were complaining that evildoers were prospering and having a good time while the innocent and the righteous were suffering and being oppressed. So they ask, "Where is the just God?" And the prophet gives them that answer, "Suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek. Yes, he is coming."

February 9, 2003

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cyck B

(Readings: Job 7:1-4, 6-7/1 Cor 9:16-19, 22-23/Mk 1:29-39)

There are two statements by Jesus and Paul in today's third and second readings. Both statements touch on the Good News or the Gospel. They reveal the intimate feelings of both Jesus and Paul with respect to the Good News of God's kingdom.

Firstly, here was Jesus who felt he must not be tied up to one town or village alone (in this case to Capernaum) where people were greatly impressed by his teaching and healing power. Informed by his disciples of the overwhelming enthusiasm he was creating among the listeners and viewers in that place, he replied, "We must go on to other villages to preach in them also, because that is why I came."

Secondly, here was Paul who, if he wanted, could boast of having preached the Gospel with much more dedication and sacrifice than all other preachers, and claim a commensurate support for his works as preacher. But he refused to do so. Why? Because he felt he was just doing what was required of him by

God, and he knew how terrible it would be for him if he did not preach the Gospel.

So, for Jesus, preaching the Good News of God's kingdom was the reason for his becoming a man. For Paul, preaching this same Gospel was a matter of duty which he could not ignore under pain of terrible consequences. In both instances, preaching the Gospel was taken very seriously. It was no joking matter.

This being the case, how do we, for whom the preaching of Jesus and Paul was intended, regard the Good News of God's kingdom. Do we feel as much obligated to live out the Gospel as those two preachers felt to communicate it to us? They seriously took the Good News and gave up their lives to have it preached to all nations. Do we take seriously the Gospel and propose to make it our guide throughout life?

These are questions demanding our honest reply, especially so because nowadays, there are numerous competitors with the Gospel of Christ that would like to form our minds, our attitudes, our values according to their image. These competitors could be as dedicated and sacrificing in promoting their own ends. They could be very resourceful in using modern methods of propaganda and technology for their purposes. Above all, they exploit the built-in advantages they already find in us, I mean, our p'ocivities and inclinations for instant self-gratification, desire to get rich quickly, recourse to painless solutions to problems, regardless of moral reservations on those matters.

The manipulations of above competitors on the one hand and our own unredeemed propensities on the other, combine to chip away little by little what shaky commitment we may have toward the gospel of Christ. Paul in his chains was heard to say, "I am not ashamed of the Gospel." We in the face of enticements from secularists and our own natural weaknesses may capitulate and admit, "We are ashamed to carry out the Gospel teaching."

The choice will eventually boil down to this: either the Gospel directs our lives, or purely human wisdom takes the driver's seat. The first reading in today's Mass (Job 7) gives a hint on what happens when man tries to sort out his troubles and problems more on the basis of human wisdom than on the wisdom that comes from above. Man may derive temporary relief and happiness but in the end, as the passage from Job puts it, his life "is like forced army service like a life of hard manual labor, like a slave looking for cool shade." In time, such a man discovers that his life is only a breath and his happiness has already ended.

May our Lord Jesus Christ and his Blessed Mother, Mary ever Virgin, help us to make the right choice. To allow the Gospel to guide every step of our life on earth so that we may be rewarded with God's kingdom in the next.

February 16, 2003

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle B

(Readings: Levi3:1-2,44-46/1 Cor 10:31-11:1/Mk 1:40-45)

After listening attentively to the first reading (Lev 13) of today's Mass, some may have entertained reservations in their minds, "Was not the author of Leviticus rather cruel in prescribing such rules for lepers, and are not the priests the improper persons to diagnose the presence of leprosy in an individual?"

The reservation are justified if taken within the context of modern medical science. But taken against the background of the primitive state of medical science at that time, the objections should quietly cease. There was no known cure for leprosy then, and the only remedy people knew of preventing its spread was to isolate the stricken individuals and forbid them from socializing with the healthy.

Furthermore, their priest were among the educated sector of society, and were understandably given the responsibility to detecting the presence of leprosy in an individual. But if reservation are to be had, one could be expressed like this, "Why did the Church choose this passage to be read at Mass?"

The passage can provoke uneasiness and revulsion in the listeners. That is why, some English translations deliberately omit the word leprosy, and use instead a general term. I think the answer is because leprosy gives us a fairly good idea of what mortal sin does to a Christian. It makes him repulsive and condemns him to a life of separation and isolation from God. As the book of Leviticus puts it, such person "must wear torn clothes, leave his hair uncombed, cover the lower part of his face, and call out 'Unclean, unclean'."

Mother Church, therefore, by choosing this passage for today's reading, sort of wants to shock us with the ugly picture of mortal sin. So that in case we are guilty of it, we may run to Jesus and beg him to heal us, just like the leper whom we heard about in today's third reading (Mark 1).

Regarding the gospel story about the leper, who accordingly exemplifies the Christian in the state of mortal sin, it is useful to note the following details: (1) the leper acknowledges that he is sick; (2) so he goes to Jesus whom he believes can be the only one to help him; (3) Jesus feels sorry for him and cures him; (4) Jesus still sends him to the priest.

The above details are eminently instructive. While lepers cannot hide their sickness from detection, some Christians pretend they have not committed mortal sins. Indeed, some grave sins can be papered over, but those Christians are fooling only themselves. It is necessary to acknowledge our grave sins when we have committed them in order to get rid of them.

Now who can heal us from our sins but Jesus? He feels sorry for us and wants to help us by touching our souls. He will say, "Be clean. Your sins are forgiven you!" But Jesus still sends us to the priests in normal cases, as a proof that we have been cured of our spiritual disease. The sacrament of confession gives us the assurance that we have obtained from God the forgiveness of our mortal sins.

There is a happy ending to the story of the leper cured by Jesus. It should also be the happy ending to Christians who availed of the sacrament of confession. We are told that the cured leper went away spreading the news everywhere such that Jesus could not enter any town without being recognized and acclaimed publicly.

Similarly, any Christian who had received the gift of pardon, can practice the advice Paul gives in today's second reading (1 Cor. 10) as evidence of his happiness, "Whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for God's glory. Cause no trouble to anyone. Try to please everyone in all you do, not thinking of your own good, but the good of all, so that they may be saved."

February 23, 2003

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle B

(Readings: Is 43:18-19, 21-22, 24-25/2 Cor 1:18-22/Mk 2:1-12)

"We have never seen anything like this!" That was how Mark ended his passage today. He was fond of reporting, the enthusiastic reactions of the crowds to the words and deeds of Jesus. He wrote that the people were awestruck, and after some moments of silence they burst into praising God. They first needed to recollect their senses and thoughts which were astounded and shaken by what they were hearing and seeing. Then recovering from their stupor,

they exploded into praises for God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this before!"

And what was it that those people had never seen before? You will answer, "Of course, the miracle." I will agree to that. Genuine miracles always astonish people. But Mark was an evangelist, not a journalist although he wrote like he was a newspaperman with an eye to details, the spectacular, the uncommon, the newsworthy. Mark's job was to proclaim the saving truth by writing or speaking, to tell the Good News. Certainly the miracle of healing was good news to the paralytic. But for his readers, for us Christians of today, what Good News has Mark proclaimed in reporting this incident so that we also, in reaction to it, might exclaim in wonder, "We have never seen anything like this."?

The Good News for everyone is, I think, that God's pardon is available to all, that our sins can be forgiven or are forgiven. But you might remark, what is spectacular about that, what is uncommon, unusual, newsworthy in that? Is that a stuff about which we can exclaim, "We have never seen anything like this"? Precisely. I think the people in the gospel story, the scribes, and we, also missed the point Mark was driving at in recording this event. Jesus was telling the people to judge which was more difficult of these two: to say, "Your sins are forgiven" or to say "Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk again." Naturally, we would all reply, the second. And when Jesus actually made the paralytic walk again by just saying one word, it was then that people marveled and exclaimed, "We have never seen anything like this."

But lost in the euphoria and excitement of the moment was the fact that Jesus forgave the sins of the paralytic. It was this that the Lord and Mark with him, was expecting the people and us to appreciate, and to praise God for making his pardon available

to all through Jesus. Forgiving sins was, certainly, a more difficult undertaking for Jesus because he had to suffer, be crucified and die so that "sins may be forgiven." Actually, the two other readings of today's Mass deal about the same topic and thus re-inforce the idea and conviction that God's pardon, always available for all, is the Good News for peoples everywhere and everytime.

Listen to the words of God that the prophet Isaiah has written for his contemporaries and for us. "Remember not the events of the past, the things of long ago consider not; See, I am doing something new!" God was sort of saying to us his sinful people to direct our attention more to the wonderful things he will do for us in the future than to the marvelous acts he did for us in the past. In that eschatological future, God is offering to share his kingdom with us. But because sin would prevent the achievement of this offer ("You burdened me with your sins, and wearied me with your crimes" noted Isaiah), so the Lord took unilaterally this step in the words of Isaiah: "It is I, who wipe out, for my own sake, your offenses; your sins I remember no more." Now, have you ever seen anything like this?

Paul, in the second reading, gives us the same assurance about God's offer to us in the eschatological future. God keeps his word, says the apostle. He is not "yes" one minute and "no" the next. Jesus Christ, the Son of God, acted like his Father; he was not alternately "yes" and "no". He was never anything but "yes". Whatever Father and Son had promised, it will be fulfilled. "Just as the Father raises the dead and gives life, so also does the Son give life to whomever he wishes" wrote John in his gospel (6:21). "Father, I wish that where I am the ones you have given me also may be with me," Jesus pleaded in his sacerdotal prayer (ibid. 6:24). Thus Paul will conclude, "God is the one who firmly establishes us in Christ; it is he who anointed us (by forgiving our sins) and who has sealed our hearts with the mark of the Holy Spirit." So, have you seen anything like this?

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