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## Preaching in a Postmodern World

# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

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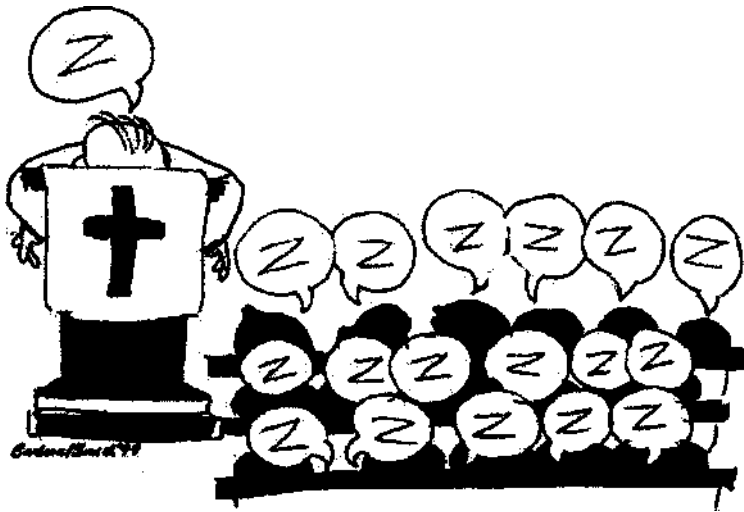
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(January-December)*

## EDITORIAL



Reverend Smith had given **boring** sermons before, but, this time, he outdid himself.

"How is my sermon?" A priest seldom asks his parishioners this question. Perhaps out of modesty, he prefers his parishioners to give their comments spontaneously. But, once in a while, it is beneficial that he asks the question. The answer can give him an indication as to whether his sermons have uplifted, provoked, inspired, transformed, or simply bored his listeners. Presumably, parishioners are eager to give an honest valuation of the sermon, as the following story shows.

One Sunday morning, after the Mass, a young priest was talking to one of his more vocal lady parishioners. Unable to control herself, the lady told the priest that his sermon had induced her to sleep. The priest was deeply offended by such a remark. Noticing her pastor's sadness, the lady said: "I'm sorry for being so critical

of your sermon. I promise to keep my mouth shut every time we see each other after the Mass. But to keep track of your homilies, I will place an egg in a basket for every boring sermon you deliver. I will give you the total number of eggs I have collected during your 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as a priest." The priest forgot about all this until the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his priesthood came.

During the celebration, the same lady came forward and said: "Father, remember me? I promised to place an egg in a basket every time you deliver a boring sermon. I also promised to give you all the eggs during your silver anniversary as a priest." Then she took out a basket with three eggs. And she handed the priest an envelope with 15,000 pesos.

The priest smiled. "Well, that's not so bad. Twenty-five years of sermons and only 3 eggs! But why are you giving me that big amount of money?" She replied: "Every time I collected a dozen eggs, I sold them."

We wonder how many eggs we will receive during our ordination anniversary. St. Paul declared that faith comes from hearing (Romans 10:17). Homilies are a potent instrument for evangelization, especially if it elucidates the words of the Gospel which is "a source of invincible hope and true joy." (*Evangelium Vitae*)

But how much time do we, priests devote to the preparation of our homilies? True, St. Paul offered excuses for lousy sermons. After all, one of St. Paul's listeners, Eutychus plunged from a window, after falling asleep while listening to his very long sermon. (Acts 20:9) He said: "God was pleased to save those who believe through the foolishness of what was preached." (I Corinthians 1:21) But this does not diminish the importance of a good preparation for a homily.

Dr. David P. Teague, an excellent contemporary preacher once wrote: *"A sermon is a Word that lives in our hearts. It speaks through our whole personality. It is a Word event in our lives, an oral encounter. The Old Testament prophets used the word na'um, "oracle" or "burden," to describe the messages they received from God, messages that weighed heavily in their hearts (cf. Numbers 23:7, Psalm 36:1, Isaiah 13:1, Jeremiah 23:33-38, Ezekiel 12:10)."*



"Tonight's sermon: What is Hell? Come early and listen to our choir practice,<sup>1</sup>

The best preparation for a good homily is a daily personal encounter with God's Word, allowing it to overwhelm us in such a way that we cannot but proclaim it. The rationalism of the modern era makes many of our sermons seem so emotionless and detached from life. We dispense truth as if we were dishing out food, instead of being prophets and sages. Authentic preaching ought to be heart-felt.

Our parishioners' ability to listen is greatly affected by the vagaries of the mass media. They can switch us off or tune us out every time our sermon becomes too long or too trivial. An article making the rounds in several Internet Websites seems to suggest how bad the situation is as regards preaching in our churches. The article's instant fame (or notoriety) should

jolt us priests from our complacency to embark on a **serious** review of **our** past homilies. The article offers a "**Survival Guide**" for parishioners when confronted with a lousy sermon. It advises parishioners to do the following to keep awake:

1. *Slap your neighbour. See if he turns the other cheek. If not, tell the priest.*
2. *Raise your hand and ask for permission to go to the rest room.*
3. *Whip out a hankie and blow your nose. Vary the pressure exerted on your nostrils and trumpet out a rendition of your favorite hymn.*
4. *Chew gum; if the sermon goes on for more than 30 minutes, start blowing bubbles.*
5. *Begin coughing and get louder and louder until you get to excuse yourself and leave the church.*

Another article by Sandra Washington insinuates to what extremes parishioners can go just to silence a preacher who drones his sermon on and on and on.

*Mrs. Graite had reached her limit;  
The pain she couldn't bear.  
Her pastor's boring sermons  
Had led her to mad despair.*

*She invited him to dinner;  
Prepared a scrumptious meal.  
He only took three bites and died,  
From the poison in the veal.*

*She thought, as she was led away  
In handcuffs to a prison cell,*



*"No more boring sermons  
Is worth all my time in jail."*

*But her prison term was short,  
'Cause the jury heard a tape  
Of the preacher's boring sermons  
And acquitted Mrs. Graite.*

Meanwhile, a group of Presbyterian ministers made a public apology to their flock. Its content can spur us, Catholic priests, to do the same.

*We, your Priests and Bishops do hereby  
formally and humbly apologize to our parishioners,  
past and present. NONE of us is individually  
responsible for ALL of the following, but all of us  
have had a part in it because, at one time or  
another, we too have committed these offenses against you:*



- O We apologize for turning you away from the Mass  
because of our boring sermons.*
- O We apologize for pretending to speak for God when  
we were only giving our own opinions.*
- O We apologize for going overtime with subjects we  
could have covered in ten minutes.*
- D We apologize for putting guilt trips on you to get  
more donation during the offertory.*
- O We apologize for shouting at and intimidating you  
and your children during our sermons.*
- O We apologize for taking away your ability to make  
your own decisions.*

- O We apologize for using as examples in our sermons things you told us in confidence.*
- O We apologize because we would not listen to you.*
- O We apologize for wanting to change everything in government but doing nothing to improve our homilies.*

Back to basics. In the seminary, we were taught that to deliver a good sermon, we have to prepare Prayerfully, Thoroughly, and Expectantly. We hope that the featured homilies and homiletic notes in this issue of the *Boletin* can inspire us to do just that.

THE EDITOR

## *FEATURES*

# **Perceptions of Parishioners on Dominican Preaching\***

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**ARMANDO F. DE JESUS**

The homily is one of the Church's institutionalized means of instructing the faithful in the rudiments of the Catholic faith. It is among the more important duties of bishops and priests. For the Dominican, preaching is meant to be his special charism. It is an area in which he is expected to be particularly proficient by the very fact of his belonging to the Order of Preachers.

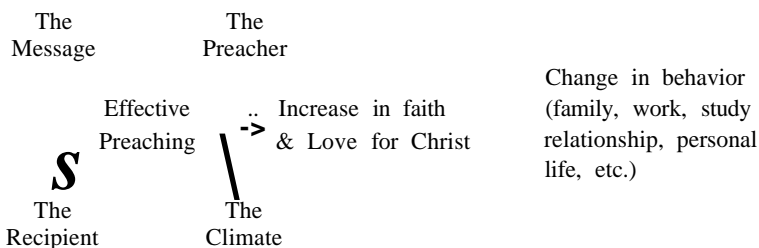
It is a fact that the Mass is about the only regular means by which the faithful is drawn into contact with the Christian community. It is also a fact, as attested by a recent survey, that of the parts of the mass, the homily is the one which the majority of Catholic worshippers find most meaningful and from which they draw inspiration in the daily grind of life. For this reason, it is important that the Church give special

\*This is a survey conducted by the UST Social Research Center. It is published here to serve as an invitation to dioceses and parishes to conduct a similar study in their respective ecclesiastical territories.

attention to the improvement of the quality of the homilies being preached in the mass. To fail in this is to lose a precious opportunity for evangelizing.

There are many factors that affect the effectiveness of preaching. One important factor is the state of the person hearing the message, as very picturesquely described in the Gospel parable of the Sower (Mt. 13, 18-23). The message itself, is another important element. And so is the physical environment and climate attendant to the preaching. Another crucial ingredient is the person of the preacher himself.

One may, therefore, conceptualize effective preaching as being composed of four major elements: the message, the recipient of the message, the circumstances, and the preacher. In terms of objectives, the end goal of preaching is increase in faith and love for Christ, which, if truly internalized, becomes a motive of change in behavior.



Using the above framework, the present study looked into the characteristics of three of the four elements identified above: the *recipient* of the message, the *message* itself, and the *climate* of preaching. It was assumed that people's

perception, subjective as they are, could serve as a template to gauge the status of the preaching. Three specific questions were addressed: 1) What are the characteristics of the Sunday worshippers in the three parishes? 2) How satisfied are they with the general quality of preaching in their parish and what specific aspects of the preaching do they tend to be satisfied or unsatisfied with? 3) Who among the different sectors of the Sunday congregation tend to hold positive and negative evaluations?

*Methodology*

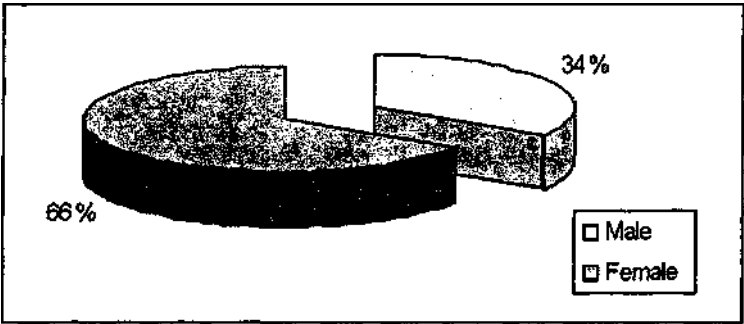
The study utilized a one-page 8-item questionnaire containing close-ended items. The questionnaires were fielded to samples of parishioners attending the afternoon anticipated masses and all of the Sunday masses. The instrument was pre-tested in a non-sample parish and subsequently administered in three Dominican-administered parishes, one from a rural community and two from an urban community.

Estimates of the worshipping population was obtained based on the sitting capacity of the churches as well as on the per-mass attendance account of the parish priests. A sample size equivalent to twenty-five percent of the estimated worshipping population was chosen through accidental sampling. The actual number of questionnaires administered and returned was as follows:

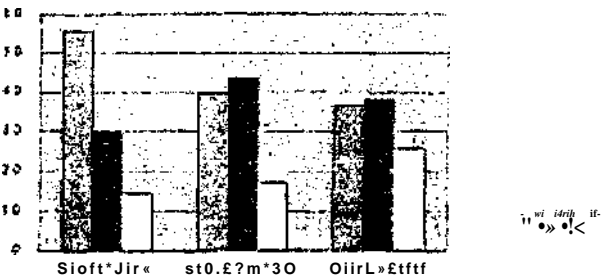
Santisimo Rosario Parish (UST)	2915
Sto. Domingo Parish	4287
Our Lady of Manaoag Parish	1943
<b>Total</b>	<b>9145</b>

# *Profile of the Sunday Congregation*

*Gender Composition.* The Sunday congregation is predominantly female. For every one male worshipper there are two females. This female predominance is true for all the three parishes with the distribution varying only very slightly from one parish to another.



*Age Structure.* On the whole, the Sunday congregation tends to be young with those in the middle to old age category constituting not more than one fifth. Of the three parishes, Santisimo Rosario Parish has the highest percentage of young people with more than one-half in the 24 and below age bracket. The adults (25 to 44 years of age) predominate in

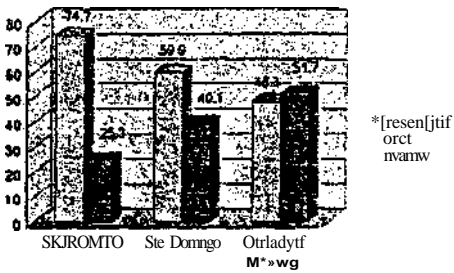


the parish of Sto. Domingo and, somewhat less, in Our Lady of Manaoag parish. In the latter there is a greater concentration of middle aged to old aged worshippers.

**Level of Education.** Those who are highly educated are distinctly visible in Sunday worship. Only about one-third of the total sample have no college education. The parish of Santisimo Rosario has the most educationally sophisticated crowd with 80 percent of the respondents reporting a college education. In contrast, there is a larger percentage from Our Lady of Manaoag Parish who has no more than high school education.

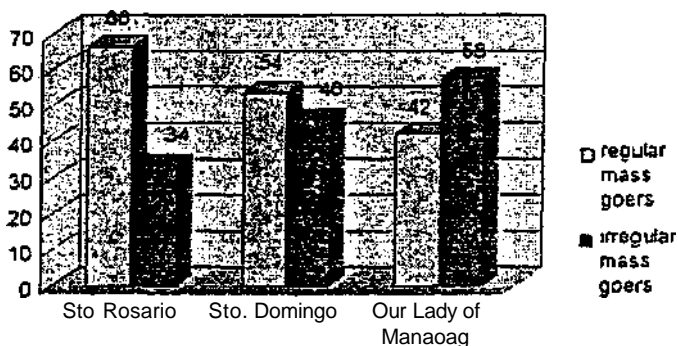


**Marital Status.** On the whole the married are under-represented in the Sunday congregation. This is particularly so in the two urban parishes where the single constitute from



60 to 75 percent of the Sunday worshippers. In the provincial parish of Our Lady of Manaoag the single and the married are almost evenly divided.

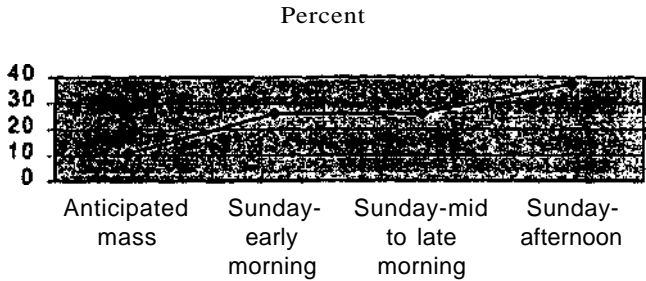
***Pattern of Attendance at Mass.*** Not all who attend Sunday masses are regular mass goers. Close to one-half (45%) do not attend Sunday mass regularly. The two urban parishes of Santisimo Rosario and Sto. Domingo appear to have more regular mass goers than the provincial parish of Our Lady of Manaoag.



In general the Sunday afternoon masses tend to draw the largest crowd of worshippers. But there are variations in time preferences among the various groups. For instance, although all masses are predominated by the female, the Saturday anticipated mass appears to be particularly appealing to them. Similarly, the younger mass goers also predominate all masses (except in the case of the early morning Sunday mass in Manaoag) but there is a tendency for the young people to prefer the Sunday afternoon masses. The same preference for afternoon masses is exhibited by the unmarried, the highly educated,

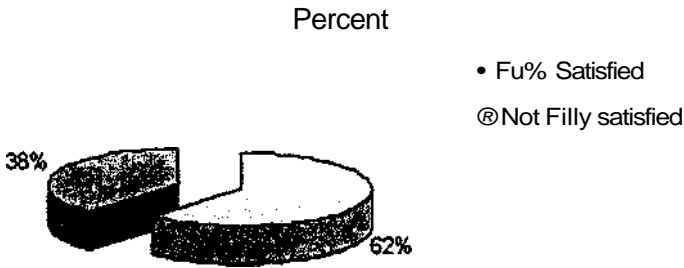


and the irregular mass goers. In contrast, the male, older, married, and lowly educated, and the regular mass goers tend to be attracted to the Sunday morning masses.



*Respondents Evaluation of the Quality of Preaching*

On the overall, there is a high level of satisfaction with the quality of the preaching. About three-fifth (62 percent) of the combined sample claimed to be fully satisfied with their priests' preaching. There are, however, variations in level of satisfaction across the different groupings of respondents. The



female, the older persons, the married, the lowly educated, and the regular mass goers tend to be more positive in their evaluations than the male, the young, the single, the highly educated, and the irregular mass goers.

Furthermore, there is also a conspicuous difference in the satisfaction level of urban and rural respondents. For example only one-fourth of the respondents from Manaoag parish acknowledged less than full satisfaction with the homilies in contrast to the respondents of the two urban parishes of whom more than 40 percent claimed not to be fully satisfied.

What accounts for these differences in perception?

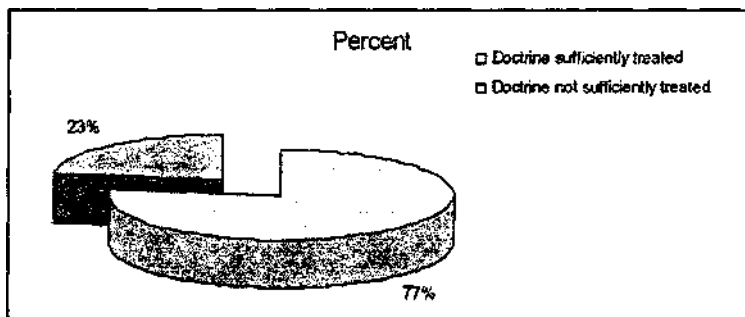
It is a widely accepted premise that religious behavior is influenced by personality and demographic factors. Such variables as gender, age, marital status, and educational level have been found to have important effects on people's expression of their religiosity. This theoretical perspective may be used to explain, in the present case, the variations in levels of satisfaction among the various socio-demographic groupings.

On the other hand, the rural-urban difference in satisfaction levels, can perhaps, be explained by the contrasting characteristics of the congregations in these parishes. The profile data presented in the foregoing section indicate that the congregation in the rural parish of Manaoag is rather different in characteristic from those found in the urban parishes of Santisimo Rosario and Sto. Domingo. For example, the predominance of the female in the former parish is not as sharp as in the other two. Furthermore, the distribution in terms of age

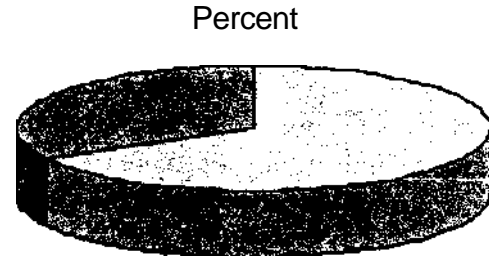
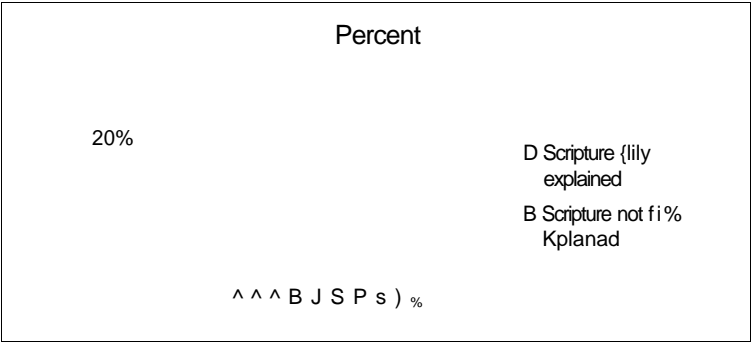
and civil status is somewhat more even in the former than in the latter. In addition, difference in level of education is less glaring in the parish of Manaoag and irregular and regular mass goers are almost equally represented. In other words, the congregation in Manaoag is more homogenous than in the other two parishes. When a congregation is more homogenous, the needs tend to be less disparate and, consequently, homilies will tend to have a more general applicability since peoples expectations are less incongruous. The net effect is the tendency to be positively disposed toward preaching.

### *Satisfaction with the Content of Preaching*

The homilies are highly appreciated for their scriptural and doctrinal content. From 77 to 80 percent say that the scriptures are adequately explained in the homilies and that doctrinal matters are sufficiently covered.

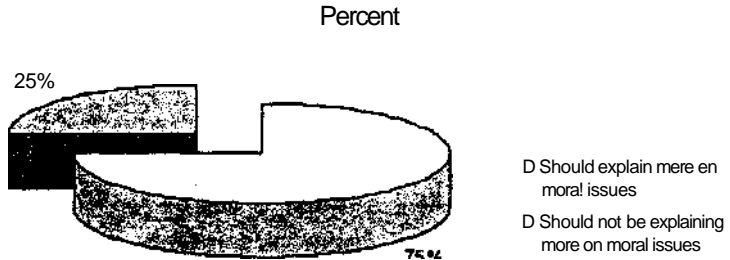


However, there is considerable number who think that social issues along with issues of personal morality are being given little emphasis in the sermons. From 67 to 75 percent expressed a desire for social issues and lessons in personal morality to be staple elements of priestly sermons.



D Social issues given needed attention

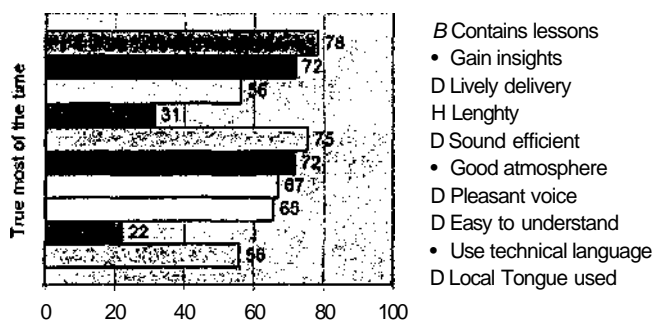
a Social issues not gyen needed attention



## *The Preaching Environment*

The degree to which the message is received is affected also by environmental factors such as sound system and church atmosphere. Its receptivity can likewise be diminished by the language used, the voice and diction of the preacher, as well as by the manner through which it is delivered. The length of the homily may also be a factor in maintaining the interest of the congregation.

In the present case, the respondents appear to be satisfied with the physical conditions obtaining within the churches. Majority finds the sound system quite efficient and the atmosphere in the church conducive to reflection. However, a considerable number (from 31 to 35) percent have expressed discontentment with such factors as length of the sermon, the voice and diction of the preacher. An even bigger number are discontented with the uninspired manner of delivery and with the sparing use of the local tongue. Some 42 percent would like priests to be using the local tongue more. Despite these limitations, however, many claim that the sermons do contain practical lessons from which they gain valuable insights.



## *Discussion*

Preaching has both a human and divine element. On the human level, its effectiveness is influenced by the same psychosocial and cultural variables that affect other forms of social communication. The person of the preacher, the character of the audience, the relevance of the message, and environmental factors, all of these can limit or enhance the efficacy of the priests' preaching. Because of this, it is imperative upon the preacher to take account of these circumscribing factors and be able to adjust his preaching according to the exigencies of these conditions.

First, the preacher must be aware of the character of his congregation and be able to adapt his preaching to the level of his audience. A predominantly female audience, for example, would call for more gender sensitiveness on the part of the preacher. Similarly, a congregation composed mostly of young people or of highly educated individuals would require a communication packaging different from that demanded by a largely old or unlettered audience. The needs of the married are quite distinct from those of the unmarried ones and, therefore, the preacher must be able to address in his preaching these differences in civil status.

These various social groupings, as has been shown by the data, have different perceptions and perspectives. And the priest should be able to "dress up" his preaching, whether in terms of delivery or content, to somehow accommodate to these differences in perspectives and viewpoints.

The preacher should be aware not only of the limitations imposed by the characteristics of his audience but, likewise, by his own personal ability and potential as a communicator. He should be seriously attentive to such important elements of communication as language, voice, diction, stage presence, and timing, and be able to take the opportunity to improve himself in this respect.

The environment in which the preaching is done is also an important variable affecting the productiveness of preaching. How many sermons have lost their virtue because of bad sound system, noisy environment, or poor ventilation? Effective management of these technical aspects of preaching should also be a focus of concern.

Finally, there are other less measurable but certainly vital factors determining preaching effectiveness. One of them is antecedent immediate preparation. A sermon that lacks preparation sounds hollow and unconvincing. The priest must, therefore, endeavor to take time to prepare for his sermon, at least proximately.

But more important than immediate preparation is the preacher's habitual state of preparation. The sermon is a reflection of the preacher's level of spirituality. And, very often, the ability of the sermon to touch people is often in direct proportion to the depth of the priest's spirituality. The spirituality of the preacher oozes out in his preaching. A spiritual priest is, as it were, in a habitual state of preparation for preaching.

Finally, the witness of the priest's life, more than any other variable, is the touchstone of the priest's effectiveness as a preacher. There is no better preacher than a priest whose life is a constant testimony to what he says in the pulpit. In contrast, there is no worse preacher than a priest who says one thing at the altar and does something else in actual practice.



# **The Need for Biblical Preaching**

**ROBERT E. MCNALLY**

## ***The Famine of the Word of God***

It is becoming more and more common to hear people speak of a famine of the Word of God. As in the days of Amos it would seem that God is withholding His Word in judgment upon a diseased and rebellious civilization. It cannot be denied that there has been a remarkable decline in great preaching since the first World War. The drop in the sales of books of sermons has also been noticeable.

One can certainly speak of a decline in biblical, evangelical preaching. Sermons are still delivered in churches that are often filled, and yet people are not really hearing the Word of the living God. One contemporary prophet has given this description of the situation in Protestant churches:

Instead of the exposition of the Word of God in the Bible in preaching, laymen are subjected to all manner

\*This is from a chapter of his book, *Reform of the Church*, 1961.

of speeches, diatribes, commentaries, newscasts, patriotic declamations, poetic recitations, aphorisms, positive thoughts, social analysis, gimmicks, solicitations, sentimentalities, and corn... The unbiblical tenor of much Protestant preaching is strange, of course, in Protestantism because the opening of the Bible within the congregation was one of the historic promises of the Reformation.<sup>1</sup>

It can be said that modern society exists in state of spiritual starvation. We have material things in abundance, but we lack the one thing needful - the Word of God. Forsyth has affirmed: "It is not sermons we need, but a Gospel, which sermons are killing."<sup>2</sup> In the opinion of Father Murphy-O'Connor, "the progressive dechristianization of society today" is to be attributed to "a failure of preaching." And he adds that there can be no doubt that "this is due in part to the spiritual mediocrity and the technical incompetence of individual preachers..."<sup>3</sup>

Among the forms which modern preaching has taken is lecturing on some topic of contemporary cultural import. Such sermons are often known as topical sermons, but they cannot be regarded as the preaching of the Word of God. They are very often informative and even edifying, but they do not

<sup>1</sup> William Stringfellow, *A Private and Public Faith* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 48.

<sup>2</sup> T. Forsyth, *The Church and the Sacraments*, 2nd ed. (London: Independent Press, 1947), p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul on Preaching* (N.Y.: Sheed & Ward, 1963), p. xiii.

bring men the salvation of Christ. They may be illuminating, but they lack the note of authority. Instead of "thus saith the Lord" people hear from the pulpit "in my opinion" or "it seems to me." Topical "preaching" has pervaded the churches of liberal Protestantism.

The homilies which have in the past dominated Roman Catholic and Anglo-Catholic services have also been "topical" in character. The pattern of the traditional homily has usually been moral instruction. Now Catholic theologians are re-examining the nature of the homily and are defining it as an explanation of a Gospel passage. Yet this still falls short of kerygmatic preaching which is oriented about the message of the vicarious death of Christ on the cross and which culminates in a call to repentance. Some Catholic writers distinguish between homilies and evangelistic preaching,<sup>4</sup> but all sermons must be evangelistic in the sense that decision and repentance are necessary even for Christians, who exist in a state of sin as well as in a state of grace.

Inspirational speaking is another form of modern preaching which is also much more cultural than biblical. In the inspirational sermon the purpose is to enliven the congregation, to stimulate or move them to some creative effort rather than to give glory to God by upholding His Word. Such preaching is prone to be more theatrical than evangelical. It is often centered about uplifting personal experiences, and these usually include the experiences of the speaker. It was Schleiermacher who

<sup>4</sup> See Dominico Grasso, *Proclaiming God's Message* (Notre Dame, Ind.: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1965), pp. 245-248.

maintained that "preaching must always take the form of testimony... to one's own experience."<sup>5</sup> But Paul averred that we should preach not ourselves but rather Jesus as Lord (II Cor. 4:5). This is not to deny that authentic biblical preaching will often serve to inspire and uplift the congregation, but this should be seen as a fruit or consequence of the preaching rather than its purpose. Moreover, in this case it is the Word of God that edifies and not the experiences of the minister.

The temptation in both topical and inspirational preaching is to impress upon the hearers one's knowledge and skills rather than to point the people to Jesus Christ. There is also a temptation particularly in scholarly sermonic lectures to address one-self primarily to the intellectuals in the congregation. This is not to denigrate scholarship, but scholarship should be brought into the service of the Word of God, and it should issue in a proclamation that is characterized by both simplicity and profundity. We would do well in this connection to heed the admonition of Philip Spener:

The pulpit is not the place for an ostentatious display of one's skill. It is rather the place to preach the Word of the Lord plainly but powerfully. Preaching should be the divine means to save the people, and so it is proper that everything be directed to this end. Ordinary people, who make up the largest part of a congregation, are always to be kept in view more than

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1928), p. 69.

the few learned people, insofar as such are present at all.<sup>6</sup>

Sectarian preaching, which also diverges from the biblical norm, consists in the parroting of a party line. What is regarded as most important is not painstaking exegesis but rather indoctrination and in-group loyalty. It is a particular theological stance that is upheld and not the living Word of God. Sectarian preachers are noted for mouthing cliches rather than bringing a fresh word from the Scripture that challenges the biases of their people. Instead of explicating the Scriptural text they use proof-texts to buttress the officially held doctrinal position. Very often they exult in the "simple Gospel" or the "old-time religion," but this proves upon close examination to be none other than the beliefs and attitudes of their forefathers. Authentic biblical preaching holds up the "full Gospel," the message of the cross related to the cultural and existential situation in which men find themselves.

Finally we are confronted today with the phenomenon known as dialogic preaching in which the preacher seeks not to proclaim a specific message but rather to answer the searching questions of his listeners. In some congregations the minister simply shares his ideas on various questions that are of immediate concern to his people. He sees himself as a fellow seeker after truth rather than a shepherd of a definite flock. In the coffee house ministry as well as in some other para-parochial ministries dialogic witnessing is very common.

<sup>6</sup> Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desideria*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), p. 116.

The influence of secular theology can be seen in this kind of preaching.

The great majority of sermons today can be categorized as ideological, meaning that they reflect the prejudices and values of the surrounding culture. Ideological preaching is that which absolutizes the particular philosophy and value system which serves the interests of the social group to which the congregation belongs. Types of ideology that are rampant today are the old-time religion, the New Social Gospel, the Reformed Tradition and the American Way of Life. What we have called inspirational speaking is almost always ideology because it tends to reinforce the social bias of the congregation. Preaching that is addressed only to the "inner man" is invariably ideological because it exempts the public sphere of man's life from the criticism of the word of God. Sectarian preaching is ideological because it enthrones the values and social beliefs of an earlier period in history. The ideologists are false prophets, for they simply mirror the prevailing opinion of the day. They soothe rather than challenge, inspire rather than convert. It can be said that preaching will either be ideological, i.e., it will reflect the values and aspirations of the culture, or it will be biblical and evangelical which means that it will contravene the *Zeitgeist* (the spirit of the times).

What are the reasons for the dearth of biblical preaching in our time? One reason is that ministers are no longer students of the Word and even less theological scholars. They are either unable or unwilling to apply themselves to serious study. They are too immersed in the social life of their communities to become students of Scripture. Again the clergy have

for the most part ceased to be men of prayer. Whereas the Puritan pastors in the colonial period would often spend as much as four hours a day in prayer, many ministers have shut prayer out of their lives altogether except for that which is said by rote. Ministers are today suffering from a crisis of identity. They no longer understand their true role. They see themselves as counselors, administrators and public relations men but not as ambassadors of Christ and shepherds of a flock.

The fact that most Protestant clergymen minister to the middle class makes it difficult for them to transcend bourgeois values and prejudices. The high participation of the clergy in service organizations like the Kiwanis, Masons, Rotarians and Eagles makes them doubly susceptible to ideological contamination, although it must be acknowledged that there are real opportunities for witnessing in such groups.<sup>7</sup> It is no wonder that many Protestant clergy find it impossible to identify themselves with the poor and the outcasts. It is not surprising that in this affluent society there are very few sermons on the evils of gluttony and luxurious living. National sins such as the manufacture of weapons of mass extermination are also seldom exposed from the pulpits of middle and upper class churches. Can it be that much of the language in the pulpit today is meaningless because God is withholding His Spirit in judgment upon men who speak in His name but yet who condone evils which are explicitly condemned in Scripture?

Surely the attempt today to make the faith palatable to its cultured despisers has contributed to the loss of biblical

<sup>7</sup> It is well to note that such fraternal groups as the Eagles, Moose, Elks and Masons are open only to Caucasians.

substance in preaching. The temptation to become apologetic, to defend the faith at the forum of reason, is one to which many clergy succumb. Although the truth of faith is intelligible, we tend to forget that the reason of natural man is darkened by sin and therefore incapable of recognizing this truth. To try to embellish the Gospel as if it were a product for sale only cheapens it. Thomas Merton has wisely observed:

To be dominated by the fear of losing our "hold" on men, especially on youth, is implicitly to confront the world in abject shame at the name and power of Christ. We do not preach Christ, we preach our own modernity, our own cleverness, our liveliness, our fashionableness, and our charm...<sup>8</sup>

### ***The Hallmarks of Biblical Preaching***

This brings us to the precise nature of biblical preaching. In what way is a biblical sermon different from an ideological sermon or a moral homily? How can we be reasonably certain that we are speaking the Word of God and not simply echoing the views of the culture?

Biblical preaching will first of all be expository. It will seek to explicate a text or passage in Holy Scripture in the light of Christ revelation. The purpose of preaching is "to make the word of God fully known" (Col. 1:25), and this entails the expounding of Scripture. Illustrations may be used

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, Doubleday & Co., Inc., 1968), p. 125.



to clarify the meaning of the text, but there is a profound difference between theological illustrations and story-telling or reminiscing. Barth says that our purpose should be to interpret the text, not to direct attention away from the text by stories or illustrations. We are called neither to entertain nor captivate our congregations but to confront them with the message of salvation. We are to be *spokesmen* of the Word, not showmen and certainly not salesmen (cf. II Cor. 2:17).

This brings us to the truth that biblical preaching will be kerygmatic in character. The Greek word *kerygma* signifies the message of redemption. Our purpose should be not simply to uncover the original meaning of the text but to relate this text to the theme of the Bible, the justification of the ungodly. In the words of Louis Bouyer: "It is not for us to make known our own ideas, nor even some abstract doctrine: we have news to tell, the greatest news, the *good* news."<sup>9</sup> We should seek neither to defend nor prove the Gospel but rather to proclaim it intelligibly and lucidly. The Gospel preacher is a herald while the ideological preacher is a propagandist and apologist.

But the ambassador of Christ is called to proclaim not only the divine mercy but also the divine judgment upon the idolatries and transgressions of men. This is to say that he should preach the law as well as the gospel. He is not only to tell what God has done for man in Jesus Christ but also declare what God now requires of man, particularly the man

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in J. D. Benoit, *Liturgical Renewal*, trans. Edwin Hudson (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1958), p. 99.

of faith. This means that his preaching should be prophetic as well as kerygmatic.

Prophetic preaching entails specificity and concreteness. It is not enough just to preach against sin. We must unmask the specific sins which plague men and show our hearers how they can make restitution. Reinhold Niebuhr has declared: "The average man is not disturbed when convicted of selfishness as long as he is not told how, when and where he is selfish and his actions are not set in the light of specific alternatives."<sup>10</sup> Neither is it sufficient to uphold Christ or love as the answer to man's predicament. We must point out *how* Christ is the answer and what paths divine love bids us to follow. Much fundamentalist as well as liberal preaching is guilty of the sin of abstractionism; no attempt is made to relate the cross of Christ to the concrete sins of men and nations today. In fundamentalist sermons personal sins are often mentioned but corporate sins are almost entirely ignored. The weakness in much neo-orthodox (esp. Barthian) preaching is that the kerygma is proclaimed but very little is said about specific transgressions of God's law and the concrete steps men need to take to lead a truly Christian life. The great theologians of neo-orthodoxy are generally exempt from this stricture. Yet there are very few ministers who have been educated in neo-orthodox seminaries who ever preach on the commandment against adultery or the commandment against blasphemy. But must not God's law be proclaimed as well as the message of free grace?

<sup>10</sup> Reinhold Niebuhr, "The Preaching of Repentance," in *The Christian Century* (June 18, 1930), p. 781.

Finally we contend that preaching which is authentically biblical will be doctrinal as well. The reason why many of the great Christian doctrines are not understood by the lay people of the church is that doctrinal matters are often avoided in sermons. To be sure the sermon should be expository and kerygmatic, but can we faithfully explicate Scripture without affirming some doctrine? Our sermons should be proclamations of the good news, but can we truly proclaim the Gospel without committing ourselves to a particular doctrine concerning the atonement or the person of Christ? Doctrine simply makes explicit what is implicit in the Bible and the Christian message. Doctrine safeguards the message of faith and also serves to communicate it. How can we preach the message of salvation without at the same time affirming the doctrine of justification by faith alone?

The distinction that is sometimes made between life-situation and expository sermons is not valid. Every sermon should begin from the Bible and proceed to the cultural situation of men today. The message must be drawn from Scripture, but it must also be directed to the modern world. Barth has rightly maintained that the only two things necessary for a biblical sermon are the Bible and the daily newspaper.

The biblical message will not only break down the walls which divide men, but it will at the same time erect new walls. It overcomes the barriers of class, race and sex, but it creates the new barrier of faith. Whereas it converts the hearts of some, it arouses the opposition of others. This is why Paul could write that the preaching of the Gospel is

a savor of death to some and to others an aroma of life (II Cor. 2: 15, 16). Yet the minister should beware of trying to create this division and opposition himself. His goal should always be reconciliation and peace among all men. It is the Gospel which creates the division, and this is due not to the express desire of God but to the blindness and stubbornness of men.

# Doctrinal Sermons

CHARLES E. MILLER, CM

*"Preach the word... constantly teaching and never losing patience." (2Tm4:2)*

A Jewish scholar once observed that in a synagogue the chief symbol is the scroll, which signifies knowledge, but in a Christian church the chief symbol is the cross, which signifies suffering. Of course we would hope that through the preaching of the Paschal mystery people would come to see the cross as a sign of glory, and we should also hope that through doctrinal preaching people would come to a proper knowledge of their faith.

Doctrinal preaching is appropriate when people either need to understand something about their faith or when they need to appreciate it. The former calls for the General End of Clearness and the latter for the General End of Impression. Doctrinal preaching may be either homilies within the liturgy or sermons and instructions outside its celebration. In either case it is important

•From his book entitled *Ordained to Preach: A Theology and Practice of Preaching*, (New York: Alba House, 1992), pp. 105-110.

to follow the principles for the General Ends of Clearness and Impression.

### ***Doctrinal Homilies from Scriptures***

A preacher should not approach the liturgical scriptures with pre-conceived ideas. He should allow the scriptures to form within him not only the message but also the manner of preaching it. Sometimes that message is best presented as a doctrinal topic by means of the General End of either Clearness or Impression.

The B cycle features the gospel according to Mark, but since that gospel consists of only sixteen chapters it is supplemented on five Sundays, the Nineteenth through the Twenty-Third, by pericopes from the sixth chapter of St. John. On the Twentieth Sunday of the B cycle we hear Jesus proclaim: "He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has life eternal, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink." He then goes on to say, "The one who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him." It would be appropriate on this Sunday to preach a doctrinal homily on the meaning of the Eucharist, perhaps as follows, General End: Clearness. Statement of Aim: "I want my audience to understand that the Eucharist is the pledge and promise of resurrection." Central Idea: "The Eucharist brings us into union with the risen Lord."

The gospel of the Tenth Sunday of Year C presents a beautifully touching scene. It is the story of the widow of Nain. St. Luke tells us that when Jesus realized that this widow was about to bury her only son, he was moved with pity upon seeing her (and I like to believe that he saw in his mind's eye that his own widowed mother one day would follow the lifeless body of her only son to the tomb). He restored the young man to life and gave

him back to his mother. It seems to me that on this Sunday one could preach a doctrinal homily with the General End of Impression. Statement of Aim: "I want my audience to appreciate the profundity of Jesus' compassion." Central Idea: "In Jesus we see that God loves us with a human heart."

### ***Doctrinal Homilies from Liturgy***

The Constitution on the Liturgy informs us that the homily "draws its content mainly from scriptural and liturgical sources" (no. 35). More specifically the General Instruction of the Roman Missal states: "The homily develops some point of the readings or of another text from the Ordinary or from the Proper of the Mass of the day" (no. 41). The point is that a true homily may flow, not only from the scriptures of the day, but also from some other parts of the liturgy. This fact is based on the liturgical axiom, "Lex orandi, lex credendi," - prayer expresses our faith. We might add another liturgical axiom, "Orthopraxis expresses orthodoxy." To realize the full meaning of these axioms, we need to understand that God's revelation is contained in Tradition and Scripture which are not two separate sources, but one expression in two forms. The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church states emphatically: "Sacred tradition and sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the word of God which is committed to the Church" (no. 10). Actually we would do well at times to avoid any suggestion of dichotomy regarding scripture and tradition by speaking of scripture and the other teaching of the Church. It is precisely because an important expression of these other teachings is found in the prayers and practices of the liturgy that a true homily may be drawn from liturgical sources. Two obvious examples are the dogmas of the Immaculate Conception and Assumption. Although neither is found explicitly in scripture, both have enjoyed liturgical witness. Homilies on these two Solemnities are rightly drawn from

the respective prefaces or presidential prayers assigned to these days. Even when a doctrine is found in scripture, it may be helpful to preach from liturgical sources; for example, on the Solemnity of Corpus Christi a true homily could be developed on the holy Eucharist from one of the eight elements of the eucharistic prayer or from one or other of the Prefaces of the Holy Eucharist.

Before the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council, some priests preached at Mass on topics which they had chosen, or which a chancery office had assigned, with no consideration for the scriptures of the day. Now at the other extreme some purists seem to think that nothing except the scriptures of the day may be preached, and they appear to be unaware that liturgical sources are appropriate. By following the principles of the Council and the directives of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal, the fullness of our faith may be proclaimed not only within the liturgical celebration of the Eucharist but as truly part of it.

### *When Further Instruction Is Needed*

Almost a century ago Pope Pius X in his encyclical *Acerbo Nimis* decreed that catechesis must be provided on occasions outside of Mass and must not substitute for a Sunday sermon. The objection to his point then was, and at times still is, that Sunday is simply the best time to reach the majority of parishioners. It is true that no matter how many instruction classes you offer in a parish, you will reach only a small number of people. That is why some bishops and priests insist that on Sunday people need more teaching than the scriptures and the liturgy can provide, and they adhere to the notion that a syllabus of topics and outlines should be organized for Sunday preaching.

Leaving aside the arguments in favor of and against a syllabus, all concerned should recognize two facts. The first is that the law



of the Church requires that a homily be given at Mass on Sundays. Canon 767 declares: "Whenever a congregation is present a homily is to be given at all Sunday Masses and at Masses celebrated on holy days of obligation." This same canon defines what it means by a homily: "In a homily the mysteries of faith and the norms of Christian living are to be expounded from the sacred text throughout the course of the liturgical year." We have just seen that the "sacred text" included both scripture and liturgical prayers. The law, it must be admitted, is not iron-clad: it says that the homily "cannot be omitted without a serious reason." The law does not suggest what a serious reason might be, but it should be noted that the Latin text is stronger than the translation is "serious reason." The Latin is *garvi de causa*. When we appreciate that a true homily is an integral part of liturgy, I think we conclude that we must not omit it or substitute something for it any more than we would omit the gospel or substitute some reading for it.

### *A Helpful Compromise*

To omit a true homily in favor of a syllabus of assigned topics is not in accord with the law, not to mention the meaning of a liturgical celebration, but a second fact must be recognized which leads to a helpful compromise. When a priest keeps his homily within a reasonable time limit, it is possible, even desirable, to give an instruction following the Prayer after Communion when announcements may be made. In some places a series of instructions was given at this time of the Mass when the practice of Holy Communion in the hand was restored and when the new Rite of the Sacrament of Penance was introduced. It is an ideal time for teaching, but the presentation must be within a time limit no more than five minutes. Much can be said in a well-organized presentation, even if it is brief. The priest need not give this instruction himself; any qualified person may do so. I must admit

that those who leave early will miss the instruction, but we simply cannot reach everyone. This compromise, although not perfect, meets the requirement of law regarding a homily and the need for instruction. Examples of topics for instruction are the Church's teaching on abortion, war, economics, social justice, and sexual morality.

Other types of presentation should not replace a homily. Missionary appeals, vocation talks, financial reports, and the like should be given after the Holy Communion before the dismissal. The presider and the presenter must cooperate with each other and agree to share the time available at Mass. The effort necessary for achieving this cooperation is preferable to substituting a talk in place of a homily. Not only can this be done; it has been done with success. Occasionally it is possible to integrate a special topic into a true homily, but an artificial connection should be avoided in favor of presenting the special topic after communion.

All of this is not to say that a preacher may not be helped by a syllabus of topics and a set of outlines which are drawn from the scripture and other liturgical sources and which can be developed into true homilies. The point is that whatever is done must be in accord with both the law which guides the liturgy and the spirit which forms it. The liturgical homily is too important to be replaced since the liturgy, of which the homily is an integral part, is the indispensable source of the true Christian spirit.

### *SUMMARY:*

Doctrinal preaching is appropriate when people either need to understand something about their faith or when they need to appreciate something about it. The General End of doctrinal sermons is either clearness or impression. Sometimes the liturgy calls for a doctrinal homily.

# **"Preaching in a Postmodern World: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics as Homiletical Conversation"**

JEFFREY F. BULLOCK, Ph.D.

## *Introduction*

There is a charcoal drawing framed in rustic wood hanging on the wall of a professor's study. It is a large creation, approximately eleven inches wide by seventeen inches in height. The charcoal image is a little blurry. The image's borders are unclear, and sometimes even seem to run together. After a time of gazing, however, the image becomes more clear. The image is a portrait of a religious figure who is probably a rabbi. His beard is long and it flows into his robe. He is sitting down, as rabbis do when they teach, but rather than an open mouth, the rabbi has one of his hands cupped behind his ear. The first move in the rabbi's lesson is a cupped ear rather than an open mouth, is to listen rather than to speak.

This portrait is a contrast to the image that has often been associated with religious speakers. Some preachers have been

recognized as charismatic, enlightening, and inspiring, but many others who practice the art of preaching have been portrayed as argumentative, overbearing, and full of empty words. Webster defined a preacher as one who exhorts in an officious or tiresome manner,<sup>1</sup> and Kierkegaard contended that there existed in Christendom no shortage of "...an everlasting Sunday babbling about Christianity's glorious and priceless truths."<sup>2</sup>

Throughout much of its history, homiletical practice has begun with an open mouth rather than a cupped ear. This essay is an effort to re-center homiletics in ontologically experiential conversation rather than the transmission of information. Homiletics should fundamentally label an experience that one *undergoes*, rather than an experience that someone *has*, controls, or possesses. The first move that any practicing homiletician should make before he or she delivers a sermon is to listen rather than to speak.

### *Contemporary Homiletical Theory*

For the last twenty-five years, practitioners of what has come to be known as the New Homiletic have attempted to discover a way through the crisis of preaching to a new effectiveness. A growing cadre of homileticians are speculating that, in order to preach this homiletical promised land, it may be necessary to turn away from the more traditional disciplines of biblical and theological studies and to contemporary rhetorical and

<sup>1</sup> *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: G. and C. Merriam Company, 1981.)

<sup>2</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Practice in Christianity*, ed. and trans., Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton University Press, 1991) 35.

hermeneutical theory. More recently, New Homiletics have looked to story, narrative, and semantic imagination as ways to move from a homiletical practice that is based in argument and representational language to one that is more experiential or presentational. However, the weakness in this collective move lies in the way that New Homiletics continue to locate their efforts in a representational view of language. Consequently, there continues to be a fundamental distinction between the linguistic world and the nonlinguistic world or, as Aristotle said, "Spoken words are the symbols of mental experience and written words are the symbols for spoken words."<sup>3</sup> Because homiletical theorists continue to adhere to a representational view of language, the Second Helvetic Confession's statement, "The preaching of the word of God is the word of God,"<sup>4</sup> is an epistemological ideal rather than an ontological reality. Whereas the Confession embraces a kind of ontological unity between the spoken word of the preacher and the word of God, the *theoretical commitments* of those who preach this word imply an ontological separation between the world of the signifiers and the world of the signified.

### *Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics*

In the philosophical hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, homiletics may find views of language and communication that

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle, *De Interpretatione*, 16a, trans. E. M. Edghill, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. R. McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941) 40.

<sup>4</sup> Office of the General Assembly Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), "The Second Helvetic Confession, *The Book of Confessions* (Louisville: Office of the General Assembly, 1991) 5.0004. Karl Barth also picks up this theme in his *Dogmatics*. Barth declared that, "Real proclamation as this new event, in which the event of human talk is not set aside by God but exalted, is the Word of God." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2nd ed., 14 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986) 1.1: 47-99.

allow them to move beyond constraints imposed by contemporary homiletical theory's language commitments to a unique appropriation of conversation (*homileon*) as a means of facilitating an experience (*Erfahrung*)<sup>5</sup> with the word. Gadamer's perspective claims that *words*, that is, talk, conversation, dialogue, question and answer, produce *worlds*. In contrast to a traditional, Aristotelian view of language where spoken words represent mental images and written words are symbols for spoken words, Gadamerian linguisticity emphasizes a fundamental unity between language and human existence. Interpretation can never be divorced from language or objectified. Because language comes to humans with meaning, interpretations and understandings of the world can never be prejudice-free. As languaged beings, humans cannot step outside of language and look at language or the world from some objective standpoint. Language is not a tool which human beings manipulate to represent a meaning-full world; rather, language forms human reality. "Being that can be understood" cannot be separated from the world, from language.

As it relates to the interpretation of sacred texts and homiletical theory, Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics is a

<sup>5</sup> By experience, I mean something akin to Gadamer's sense of *Erfahrung* as opposed to *Erlebnis*. *Erlebnis* is something one has; something which is embedded with a subject/object dichotomy. In this context, an aesthetic experience that a preacher imparts or provides for a congregation. *Erfahrung*, however, is something that one undergoes; the subjectivity of the subject/object dichotomy is overcome by an event of understanding. In this context it implies an integrative event in which preacher and congregation participate in coming to an understanding of text together. Since it is difficult to point to one place in *Truth and Method* where these terms are clarified, see the overview of the distinctions between *Erlebnis* and *Erfahrung* in the translators' preface of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Second Revised Edition, Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall, trans. (New York: Continuum, 1993) xiii-xiv.

theory of interpretation which acknowledges that every sacred text comes to us with a history or tradition, but it is nevertheless a sacred text that must be encountered again and again as it intersects with the living out of community life. Therefore, to be meaningful, to be understood, to be experienced as *Erfahrung* rather than *Erlebnis*, each tradition-bound text must be applied or field-tested; it must be in conversation with the community of faith as it endeavors to live out its faith. This hermeneutical approach calls forth a fundamental shift in the role of the preacher. In this model, the preacher is first a pastor, a listener, not only to sacred texts as they come to him or to her in tradition, but also to the ways in which sacred texts intersect with the lives of the congregation. In this approach, the preacher is not the resident expert whose function is to dispense methodologically-acquired truths. The preacher is a conversation partner, an attuned participant whose sermons incorporate elements of interpretation and application and manifest themselves as articulated practice.

### *Two Approaches to Preaching as Conversation*

Preaching as conversation is a metaphor that one well known homiletical theorist recently began to pursue, but the model Lucy Rose envisioned was fundamentally different from one that is informed by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. I can most economically introduce my sense of preaching as conversation by clarifying how Rose's model, which seems to echo important aspects of Derrida's version of play,<sup>6</sup> contrasts with a model anchored in Gadamer's markedly different understanding of play.

<sup>6</sup> Rose did not cite Derrida in either her article or her dissertation. However, in a telephone conversation on February 10, 1996, she said that Derrida was influential

Rose argued that preaching was a time "...to gather the community of faith around the Word where the central conversations of the church are refocused and fostered [and this is] a conversational understanding of preaching."<sup>7</sup> She saw this vision of preaching as an addition to current theory.<sup>8</sup> She justified the need for this addition by locating her theory in the new "postmodern world" where, by definition, all definitions can be reworked, and where there is room for her and others to share "experiences" that have previously been left on the margins of the modern world.<sup>9</sup> She contended that,

In the postmodern world these "small stories," our lived experiences from the fringes of the modern world, are no less important than the stories of those who were "somebodies" in the "old country." In fact our "small stories" become our starting points for expanding former definitions. We attend to and reflect on our experiences, our actual practices, and our hopes as preachers. Then, as we speak and write these reflections, in the postmodern world, since we are preachers, the meaning of the *wordpreaching* by necessity stretches to embrace us.<sup>10</sup>

in her understanding of conversation as play. See Lucy A. Rose, "*Conversational Preaching: A Proposal*," *Journal for Preachers* 19.1 (1995), and Lucy A. Rose, "Preaching in the Round-Table Church," diss., Emory 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Lucy Rose, "*Conversational Preaching: A Proposal*," 27.

<sup>8</sup> Rose, 26-27.

<sup>9</sup> Rose, 26.

<sup>10</sup> Rose, 27.



In Rose's conversational model, the experiences of "conversational partners"<sup>11</sup> are elevated onto a level that is equal to the experience of the preacher whose responsibility is to focus the homiletical conversation. She contended that the content of this "postmodern" preaching did not "slide into the quagmire of relativism," however, because "...the sermon's content is a proposal offered to the community of faith for their additions, corrections, or counterproposals."<sup>12</sup> In this "postmodern" world, "no 'truth' is objective, absolute, ontological, or archetypal [...] [rather], the only way I can speak of 'truth' is eschatologically."<sup>13</sup> Conversational preaching values "...poetic, evocative language because of its ability to invite to the sermonic round table the experiences" of other conversational partners, and the inductive sermons of Craddock and the narrative sermons of Lowry are "...potentially heuristic forms that invite the congregation to work out their own meanings in a give-and-take with the Spirit.... Conversational preaching is communal, heuristic, and nonhierarchical."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Rose, 28. These conversational partners include participants in: 1) divine-human conversation between members of the community of faith, 2) divine-human conversations between community of faith and God, 3) human-human conversations (27). Additionally, these "conversation partners" include "...those who preach and those who do not, those we are confident in matters of faith and those who find themselves awkward and unsure, those for whom church is a second home and those who rarely set foot in institutionalized holy space, those who are 'like us' and those whose ideas come from 'off the wall' or 'out in left field,' those who are glib and those who are mute, those who are successful in the eyes of the world and those whose true selves have been slammed and silenced" (28).

<sup>12</sup> Rose, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Rose, 28. Rose elaborated on her understanding of "truth" as eschatological by saying that, "There will come a Day when we will understand, but until that Day we live by faith and hope, not by sure knowledge, clear facts, or unambiguous truth" (28).

<sup>14</sup> Rose, 28.

Rose's interest in a conversational approach to preaching was an important contribution to contemporary homiletical theory because it indicated a growing concern among homiletical theorists about what and even how to preach in a postmodern world. Because of Rose's intentional interest in the "practice" or the "flesh and blood" of what preachers actually do, she invited a dialogue between contemporary homiletical theory and Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics. However, as I have indicated, the trajectory that she pursued was quite different from the trajectory intimated by Gadamer. The difference between the two trajectories can be condensed into the difference between Gadamer's and Derrida's understanding of play.

Derrida comes as close as he ever does to articulating a *Position* on the meaning of play in an interview with Julia Kristiva. He states that, "*Differance* is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the *spacing* by means of which elements are related to each other."<sup>15</sup> For Derrida, the *a* of *differance* refers to the generative movement in the play of differences... Differences are the effects of transformations, and from this vantage the theme of *differance* is incompatible with the static, synchronic, taxonomic, ahistoric motifs in the concept of *structure*. "<sup>16</sup> Like Kierkegaard, Derrida almost always communicates indirectly, *playfully*. The purpose of his play is to involve the reader in a moment of transgression, a moment that is simultaneously upheaval and movement. Playful transgression is a resistance to and a recognition of the "...limit [that] is always at work,"<sup>17</sup> the

<sup>15</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 27.

<sup>16</sup> Derrida, "*Semiology and Grammatology*, 27.

<sup>17</sup> Derrida, "*Implications*," 12.

modern quest for absolute final definitions. If there is an absolute for Derrida, it is the absolute of play, but it is an absolute that is controlled by nothing. For Derrida, "there is no closure beyond the ceaseless play of dissemination."<sup>18</sup>

In Rose's proposal, "conversation" served as the *playful* metaphor for the re-evaluation of modernism and its drive for truth and absolute definitions. Rose foregrounded a Derridian *playful* conversation, one where the limits of modernism's influence on the traditional definitions of preaching may be transgressed. This commitment surfaced when she wrote that she envisioned a practice "where no single story is 'the whole truth and nothing but the truth' or where [my] story or your story as the preacher with our unavoidably particular wagers, interpretations, and meanings is neither more nor less important than the story of every other believer, congregational groupie, or hanger-on who hopes against hope to trade secondhand beliefs for firsthand discipleship."<sup>19</sup> This description of an ongoing conversation is genuinely attractive because it is so open and inclusive.

But as I noted, there is a significant difference between Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics and the kind of '*homileoing*' that it facilitates, and Rose's conversational proposal. Simply, Rose's conversational model transgresses the limits without articulating a position. Gadamer's conversational model articulates a position, but one that is always on the way to becoming, always already on the way to being worked out in community life. One of

<sup>18</sup> Neal Oxenhandler, "*The Man with the Shoes of Wind*," *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, Eds. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) 266.

<sup>19</sup> Rose, 29-30.

the difficulties of transposing Derrida's critical style onto the contemporary homiletical forum is that Derrida is a critic who performs his criticism, and his performance takes place through a style of writing that resists the "...theological presence of a center."<sup>20</sup> Through the style of "double gesture," Derrida struggles to avoid being pinned down to a meaning, a word, for the double gesture is a word that is almost "unspeakable." He asserts that, in the West, there has been a privileging of speech over writing, a "phonologism,"<sup>21</sup> the limits of which he endeavors to challenge in his particular style of play.

Following Derrida, Rose's proposal advocated a free-flowing exchange where each participant's story shared equal authority and meaning, where "truth" existed eschatologically, that is potentially, *around* the Word. If there was a meaning that emerged from the sharing of these conversations about individual experiences, it was akin to the kind of meaning that participants experience in Derridian play. By extension, it seems that one of the questions that emerges from Rose's proposal is whether it is possible to actually "talk" about such an experience of play. After all, according to Derrida, transgressive play is almost unspeakable and yet, paradoxically, one of the essential components of preaching is speaking.

Gadamer also recognizes the central importance of conversation within the hermeneutical enterprise. However, his vision of conversation or dialogue is concretized *in* language. Rather than the ceaseless nature of Derridian *playful* conversation, Gadamerian conversation comes to its most complete fruition *in*

Derrida, "*Implications*," 14.

Derrida, "*Implications*," 14.

language which happens in the *process* of genuine playing. Gadamer asserts that understanding *begins* "when something addresses us."<sup>22</sup> Understanding occurs in language because "language is the medium where I and world meet or, rather, manifest their original belonging together," and understanding is always in the process of being concretized.<sup>23</sup> Truth exists in the here and now rather than in some eschatological future. The "whole value of the hermeneutical experience...seemed to consist in the fact that here we are not simply filing things in pigeonholes but that what we encounter in a tradition says something to us.... [Understanding] is a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*) - i.e., an *encounter* with something that asserts itself as truth."<sup>24</sup> Gadamerian truth is not the truth of my subjective experience or individual story, a truth that will only be known in some eschatologically future Day, nor is it the truth of certainty that is ostensibly achieved through the use of scientific method. Gadamer envisions a truth that is facilitated when conversation partners are *being played* by the game. It is a truth that emerges from being subject *to* a text and its traditions rather than being the subject *of* one's own experience with that text. As Gadamer contends, "What we mean by truth here can best be defined again in terms of our concept of *play*."<sup>25</sup> Elaborating, he says that,

When we understand a text, what is meaningful in it captivates us just as the beautiful captivates us. It has

<sup>22</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 256.

<sup>23</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 474-476.

<sup>24</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 490. My emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 490.

asserted itself and captivated us before we can come to ourselves and be in a position to test the claim to meaning that it makes. What we encounter in the experience of the beautiful and in understanding the meaning of tradition really has something of the truth of play about it. In understanding, we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe.<sup>26</sup>

Contrary to Derrida and perhaps even to Rose, Gadamer envisions a version of play that is out of our control, a play that occurs when "something addresses us." Unlike Rose's version where the playing, conversing subject is more or less autonomous, or the *subject* o/and center of the *playful* conversation, Gadamer contends that it is only when historically effected beings are *subject to* the meaning of the text as it comes in and through tradition that humans are able to be drawn into an event of truth. As players, humans are *subject to* rather than subjects *of the* game. Humans do not control their understanding, nor do they operate as subjects over against objects. Humans are listeners, receivers, men and women who are speaking and being spoken to, but men and women who must finally find the words to speak the truth about which they are experiencing, the truth which cannot be postponed to some eschatological future. In order to be genuine, the *Erfahrung* experience of play must finally find application in practical life. The experience of play cannot remain wordless, as it may for Derrida, because human beings exists praxically, continually, and immediately *in* language.

Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 490.

The implications of Gadamer's project for practicing homiletics are far reaching. Preachers who are informed by Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics paradoxically preach with a cupped ear. Their first move is to listen rather than to speak, to be subject to the events that make up the life of the congregation. Their preaching can therefore be a communicating, a verb, an ongoing interaction or activity that intersects with and emerges from their actual practice of ministry. Even then, their arrival, their utterance, their sermon, is always already a heralding, a pointing to something that surpasses their own horizon of understanding. They will never receive or have the final word. They must therefore be cognizant of the "open space" that surrounds every sermonic utterance, the "space" that leaves an open door for genuine listening, questioning and answering, the to-and-fro, the give-and-take of authentic interpersonal communicating, "...the *discipline* that guarantees truth."<sup>27</sup> Such preaching is a process of conversation, of *homiletics*, that is facilitated *in* and *through* language, an experience of conversation *between* both preacher and congregation.

## Conclusion

Gadamer's ontological understanding contributes to homiletical theory in two ways. First, it introduces a way of thinking about *homiletics* that is a process of ongoing conversation rather than a *method* of *retrieval* and/or *representation* of biblical texts. As Stanley Deetz writes,

Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 491.

The genuine conversation [that Gadamer has in mind] does not require the baring of one's feelings, nor the hearing out or accepting of another's opinions though these may accompany it. The genuine conversation is characterized more by giving in to the subject matter and allowing it to develop in the interchange. As Gadamer showed: "To understand what a person says is... to agree about the object, not to get inside another person and relive his experiences." This kind of conversation develops less from the will of the participants than from the power of the subject material... The ideal is not, then, of "self-expression and the successful assertion of one's point of view, but a transformation into communion, in which we do not remain what we were."<sup>28</sup>

Second, Gadamer's ontological understanding articulates a different sermonic experience, an experience (*Erfahrung*) that happens in the interchange of genuine conversation, *in* communicating, rather than an experience (*Erlebnis*) that happens *because* of language. As understanders who participate in speaking and listening, Gadamer recognizes that human understanding is always already underway and never completely finished. Human horizons are always limited and incomplete, and they exist inside and not outside of language. Gadamer's ontological understanding contributes to homiletical theory by introducing a way of thinking

<sup>28</sup> Stanley Deetz, "Conceptualizing Human Understanding: Gadamer's *Hermeneutics* and American Communication Studies," *Communication Quarterly* 26(1978): 19-20.



that is more of a process of ongoing *homileoing* or dialogue in language than a method of retrieval and expositing of biblical texts. One who seeks to understand is in conversation with a given text, with the author of that text, and with the tradition that carries a specific text. This hermeneut as understander does not view texts as objects or artifacts, but as communicatings<sup>29</sup> that are still communicating. Therefore the hermeneut's words, their talk, their conversation, their language does not mirror reality, it constitutes it.<sup>30</sup> Their words constitute their worlds. This view of understanding does not see language as a tool but as a mode of being human. As Stewart contends, there is only one kind of human world, "a pervasively languaged kind."<sup>31</sup> Functioning more holistically than exegetically, this view of hermeneutics posits that conversation and dialogue contribute more to understanding than analysis or argument.

Therefore, it would appear that the Gadamerian homiletician would be more of a participant in an ongoing conversation than a scriptural expositor. He or she would be more of a herald than a

<sup>29</sup> In a way that is analogous to Gadamer, Brenda Dervin attempts to think through the value of philosophizing as a process rather than a product which is an approach that presumably will lead to more "relevance" (51-52). She argues that "Differences come into existence in communication; differences are bridged in communication; and differences are destroyed in communication" (51-52). For Dervin, it is the actual praxis of communicating grounded in phronesis that motivates communication theory. Brenda Dervin, "Verbing Communication: Mandate for Disciplinary Invention," *Journal of Communication* 43 (1993): 51-52.

<sup>30</sup> John Stewart, *Language as Articulate Contact: Toward a Post-Semiotic Philosophy of Communication* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 115.

<sup>31</sup> Stewart, 124.

preacher, one who announces and shares his or her experience of the world, but one who, nevertheless, realizes that the "free space" that surrounds his or her understanding aptly characterizes the necessity for further reflection and conversation. This preacher would embody the recognition that it is through talk, question and answer, and genuine dialogue, that "The preaching of the word of God, is the world of God. As with the two men on the road to Emmaus in St. Luke's gospel, understanding for this preacher arises out of genuine conversation, out of *homileoing*.

# **Model Homilies for the Advent and Christmas Seasons**

**KEEP AWAKE!**

1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Advent

By Fr. Munachi E. Ezeogu, CSSP

Here is a quiz for you. You are sleeping. You are dreaming. A big lion is chasing you. You try to run away and you see a tiger coming in front of you. You turn sideways, but every side you turn to, you find a ferocious animal coming after you. How can you escape? The answer is: Wake up.

By waking up one enters a whole new world of reality, different from that of the dream world. What was a huge problem in the dream state becomes a non-issue in the waking state. Dream state concerns and priorities lose their importance and new concerns and priorities take their place. For instance, you discover that your problem is no longer how to escape from wild beasts but how to beat the morning rush and arrive early for work. We can

relate to the change that occurs between a dream consciousness and a wake consciousness. A similar and even more significant change occurs when we move from a state of being spiritually asleep to that of being spiritually awake, when the soul is awake and alert to spiritual reality.

In today's gospel Jesus admonishes and encourages his followers to remain alert in the spirit. He was about to leave them for an uncertain length of time. By their faith and commitment to Jesus, his followers are like people who have roused themselves from spiritual slumber. But the time of his absence would be a time of trial for their faith life when they would be tempted to doze off. He enjoins them to remain awake and watchful so that whenever he comes to them he would find them not sleeping but watching in faith, ready to welcome him.

Today we enter the season of advent: a time of special preparation for the coming of the Lord. Mark's portrait of the doorman watching out to open for the Lord whenever he "suddenly" appears is an image of what we are expected to be doing all year long but especially during the season of advent. The doorman keeps awake in order to recognize and welcome the Lord at his coming. Faith, likewise, transforms us into people who are able to recognize the Lord and willing to receive him. Recognition is crucial because the Lord does not always come in easily recognizable ways. At Bethlehem he came in the form of a newborn child and people did not recognize him. In the Parable of the Last Judgment which we heard last Sunday he said he came to people in the form of the most needy and disadvantaged of this world and many did not recognize him. But true people of faith did recognize him and serve him in these people who live in the

blind-spot of society. Faith is first a way of seeing, and then a way of living.

The "wicked" who were consigned to hell in the Last Judgment were probably waiting for the final coming of the Lord and failed to recognize him in his day-to-day coming. The shocker in that parable is that Christ comes into our lives in the form of the ordinary people and events of our everyday lives. We need to be awake in faith to recognize and serve Christ in these commonplace and routine encounters since it will do us no good to recognize him on the Last Day if we have not recognized and served him day by day.

Before we conclude, let's say a word about Jesus' saying **"But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father"** (Mark 13:32). This saying can be understood literally to mean that Jesus did not know the date of the end of the world. It can also be understood as a strategy meant to discourage the disciples from further inquiry into the matter. In either case the implication for us is the same: Put an end to idle speculations regarding the Last Day. Open your eyes in faith to see God present and active in your life and in your world. Open your heart and your house to the Lord who comes to you daily in the form of the needy man or woman. This is the best way to prepare to welcome the Lord when he comes on the Last Day.

Letting God Find Us  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Advent  
By Fr. Munachi E. Ezeogu, CSSP

A school principal called the house of one of his teachers to find out why he was not in school. He was greeted by a small child who whispers: "Hello?"

"Is your Daddy home?" asked the principal.

"Yes," answered the whispering child.

"May I talk with him?" the man asked.

"No," replied the small voice.

"Is your Mommy there?" he asked.

"Yes," came the answer.

"May I talk with her?"

Again the small voice whispered, "No."

"All right," said the man, "Is there any one there besides you?"

"Yes," whispered the child, "A policeman."

"A policeman? Now, may I speak with the policeman?"

"No, he's busy," whispered the child.

"Busy doing what?" asked the principal.

"Talking to Daddy and Mommy and the fireman," came the child's answer.

"The fireman? Has there been a fire in the house or something?" asked the worried man.

"No," whispered the child.

"Then what are the police and fireman doing there?"

Still whispering, the young voice replied with a soft giggle, "They are looking for me."

It would be pretty hard for the "rescuers" to find this child as long as the child keeps hiding from them. In today's gospel we see John the Baptist in the desert calling out to the people of Judea to come out into the open desert and let God find them. You can liken it to the fireman calling out to the "lost" child. The child has to leave his hiding place and come out into the open for the fireman to find him.

To go into the desert is to leave behind the normal props of life on which we tend to depend. Such life props we often find in our job, in relationships and in routine religious practices. God cannot do much with us as long as we hope and trust in these things as the first things that give meaning to our lives. When the heart is full no one can come into it, not even God. You have first to let go of what your heart is holding on to before you can embrace God. This letting go is symbolized by a journey into the barren desert.

In the Bible the desert has come to mean a place of encounter with God. It was in the desert that the people of Israel met God and learnt the ways of God. There they became God's own people and the Lord became their God. But first they had to give up all the things that make for the good life that they were enjoying in Egypt: **"the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the**

**cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic"** (Numbers 11:5). Jesus, before beginning his public ministry, spent forty days and nights in the desert. It was a time of discovering and deepening his personal relationship with God. By calling the people into the desert John was calling them to let go of their false hopes and securities and learn to hope and trust in God alone.

John lived what he preached. By his lifestyle, his dressing and eating habits, he showed that the meaning of life is not to be found in the abundance of material possessions but in relationship with God. Simplicity of life and detachment from unnecessary cares and worries of social life frees the heart for a personal relationship with God. To go into the desert is the first step in true repentance. It means abandoning our usual hiding places and putting ourselves in a situation where God can easily reach us. It is the leveling of those hills and the filling of those valleys that make it difficult for God to reach us and save us.

In the season of advent the church extends to us the call of John the Baptist to repent and confess our sins in preparation for the One who is to come. It is an opportunity to rediscover our total dependence on God. God has made us for Himself, as St Augustine discovered, and our hearts are restless till they rest in God. When we realize this and make room for God in our lives, then we are on the way to true repentance after the example of John the Baptist.



## Sinless Woman

### Immaculate Conception

By Fr. Munachi E. Ezeogu, CSSP

Popular imagination has added an interesting slant to the story of the woman taken in adultery. You know the story: The Pharisees bring the woman before Jesus for judgment and Jesus says, "Let the person who is without sin cast the first stone." They fell silent, and then, all of a sudden a stone came flying from the crowd. Jesus looks up, surprised and amused, and then says, "Hold it, mother? I am trying to make a point, here." This joke likens the sinlessness of Mary to the sinlessness of good women and men we have known. For we have known many good men and women who think that their holiness of life is their personal achievement. As a result they develop a certain holier-than-thou attitude toward others who have not attained their level of holiness. They become intolerant, angry and judgmental toward those they regard as sinners. People like that would not hesitate to throw the first stone at a sinner caught red-handed like the woman in our story.

That is why the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception which we celebrate today becomes a very important one. It reminds us that Mary's sinlessness is not something that Mary achieved by her own power. It is a gift of God, given to her right from the very moment of her conception. It is in the genes, as they say. In the same vein, those of us who happen to be holy, who sin less than the average sinner, should regard our holiness as basically a gift of God and not an achievement. Our attitude should then be characterized by two basic attitudes, thankfulness to God, and humility before those who are naturally and spiritually less gifted than we are.

The dogma of the Immaculate Conception of Mary was defined by Pope Pius IX in 1854. It affirms the belief that the Blessed Virgin Mary was free from sin right from the very beginning of her life. That means that by the grace of God, she was shielded from original sin which all humankind inherit at the very moment they begin to live, i.e. at the moment they are conceived in their mother's womb. That means that Mary was not burdened with a defective human nature with which you and I come into the world. She came into the world with a perfect human nature like that of Eve and Adam before they sinned and fell from grace. God gave her this perfect human nature not as a reward for anything she did, not on account of any merit on her part, but in view of the singular role she was to play in life, namely, that of being the mother of God's Son. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception tells us something about who Mary is. But maybe it tells us more about who God is and who we are in light of God's providential love.

Belief in the Immaculate Conception of Mary is belief in a provident God, i.e., a God who provides for the future, who prepares His children for their assigned task in life even before they are born, a God who foresees and equips us with all the natural and supernatural qualities we need to play our assigned role in the drama of human salvation. God anoints them already in the womb those men and women whom He created to be His prophets. As He told Jeremiah, **"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations"** (Jeremiah 1:5). God does not just throw us into this world wide wilderness and then leave us to fight it out among ourselves. The theory of evolution with its doctrine of the survival of the fittest may describe human nature in its fallen state, in the state of original sin, it does not describe

life for the people of God redeemed by grace from the unbridled effects of the Fall.

As we rejoice with Mary, God's most favoured one ("full of grace") on the feast of her conception, let us thank God for His love and mercy which embraces us right from the moment of our own conception. As Scripture says, **"For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"** (ICorinthians 4:7). Everything is gift, everything good in us is God's grace. For we all, children of God, are also favoured ones and heirs of God's grace. Yet Mary remains the most favoured one, the mother of all favoured ones, the one that enjoys the fullness of grace.

### **No one greater born of woman**

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Advent

By David Sanders, O.P.

Why is there all this fuss about John the Baptist? We are told that he was the precursor, the one who introduced Jesus to the people. But surely Jesus could have introduced himself and just stated, 'I am the messiah': why the need for this guide?

The answer lies in our blindness. Often we are so wrapped up in our society that we cannot see what its real needs are, and what sort of person can meet them. John the Baptist is one of those figures in history who stand apart from society and gain the insight which allows them to judge society. John spent most of his adult life in the wilderness, abstaining from alcohol, living on locusts and wild honey, and dressed in a camel skin, which recalled

the dress of Elijah, another great prophet from Israel's past who was also ablaze with a reforming zeal.

This craggy figure, like the Mandelas, the Dorothy Days and Solzhenitsyns of today, refused to be fooled by the spin which denies the evil around us and pretends there is peace when no peace exists. He taught 'the whole people of Israel' to see the rottenness at the heart of their society, and then to acknowledge their sins and repent by being baptized in the waters of the Jordan.

He was a prophet who had the courage to challenge the people and teach them what they really needed, but he was more than a prophet because he showed them how to find the one who could bring them salvation. He pointed away from himself to Jesus, the greater one, the only one who could deal with sins at the deepest level through the baptism of fire and the Holy Spirit which he would undergo when he offered himself in sacrifice upon the cross. As Jesus passed by, John showed them where to look:

Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

John not only taught them how much they needed a savior, but then through his particular witness he helped them to see the contrasting way in which Jesus brings salvation to people standing under the judgment of God. In Christ God comes close to his people, so close that he was willing to submit himself to John's baptism as a sign of solidarity with sinful humanity. So close that he did not live in the desert, but mixed with the crowds in the towns and villages of Galilee. He did not fast alone but spent his time eating and drinking with sinners; he is not only the messenger of God's wrath, but in himself he makes present the good news of the salvation of God.

John's witness is so important for understanding Jesus that not only does the New Testament present them in the Gospels as inseparable at the beginning of Jesus ministry, but Luke shows us how even before his birth John leapt for joy in his mother's womb at the approach of Jesus carried by his mother Mary.

John's witness continues to play a crucial role for us. In a society which finds judgment offensive and yet craves to find ways of dealing with its guilt, which denies sin but demands forgiveness, John shows us that forgiveness is not possible unless you first recognize that there is something that needs to be forgiven. No forgiveness without judgment first. John binds so that Jesus may loose us.

Even in his cruel death, slain by an unjust king, John bore witness to Jesus. As the preface for today's mass says:

You found John worthy of a martyr's death, his last and greatest act of witness to your son.

We need John enlighten us, so that we can see our need for repentance and then to recognize the one who can save us. No wonder we celebrate his birth with such honor, for before the kingdom of God appeared,

I tell you solemnly, of all the children born of women a greater than John the Baptist has never been seen.

## **Mothers of Christ**

4th Sunday of Advent

By Fr. Munachi Ezeogu, CSSP

The nursery school kids were preparing a Christmas play. Little Cynthia did not like the part she was assigned to play. She wanted to change parts with her friend Monica. When the teacher asked her why, she answered, "Because it is easier to be an angel than to be the mother of Christ." The little girl is certainly right. To be the mother of Christ is no light matter. Yet difficult as it sounds, that is exactly what we are all called to be. In fact, we could say that even though Jesus was born in Bethlehem his real desire is to be born in the hearts of believers, to be re-produced by believers.

Mother of Christ is a title we usually reserve for Mary. But Mary is mother of Christ in two senses. She is mother of Christ in the physical sense that she carried Jesus in her womb and gave birth to him. This is an unrepeatable event and an honour that no other human being could share with her. But she is also mother of Christ in a spiritual sense. In a spiritual sense the role of being mother of Christ is available to all Christians. We all, men, women and children, can and should become mothers of Christ. The idea of Christians called to be mothers of Christ is very common among Christian mystics. The Dominican priest mystic, Meister Eckhart, said that God made the human soul for her to bear the divine Son, and that when this birth happens it gives God greater pleasure than the creation of heaven and earth.

What is this spiritual motherhood of Christ and how does it happen? For the answer we need to go right back to Jesus himself.

*While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. Someone told him, "Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matthew 12:46-50)*

This shows that (a) Jesus expects his followers to be not only his brothers and sisters but his mothers as well, and (b) the way to be the mother of Jesus is by doing the will of God. Spiritual motherhood of Christ is attained by saying yes to God, even when God appears to demand from us what is humanly impossible, like asking Mary to be a virgin mother. To become mothers of Christ we need to make the prayer of Mary our own: **"Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word"** (Luke 1:38).

This prayer of Mary has been known as the world's greatest prayer. It is the prayer that brought God down from heaven to dwell in the soul and body of a lowly young woman. It is the prayer that brought about the greatest event in human history, God becoming human in Jesus. It is a prayer that changed forever the course of human history some 2000 years ago. This prayer is so very different from what has been called the world's most common prayer, the prayer in which we try to get God to do our will. The world's most common prayer says, *"My will be done,"* whereas the world's greatest prayer says, *"Thy will be done."*

Yes, little Cynthia was right. It is not easy to be the mother of Christ. But in today's gospel Mary shows us how. It is in hearing God's word and saying yes to God even when God's will seems to go against all our plans and hopes for the future. As Christmas draws near, Mary reminds us that the best Christmas, in fact the only true Christmas, is that Christ be born not in the little town of Bethlehem but in the inner sanctuary of our hearts.

### **From Joy to the World to Joy in my Heart**

Christmas Vigil Mass

By Fr. Munachi E. Ezeogu, CSSP

Christmas is finally here. All four weeks of Advent we have been waiting and praying for the coming blessings of Christmas. And now Christmas is here. Today the angels are bringing us the good news of great joy for all the people, for to us is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. This good news of great joy is for all the people of God. As people of God we have a claim to the joy and the peace that the birth of Christ brings to the world. But how do I personally enter into this "great joy" of Christmas? Christmas rings out "joy to the world," yes, but how do I make this joy my own? This is an important question, for, even though God has declared joy to the whole world, there are still many among us who do not flow in this joy, many among us who do not know how to claim this joy and make it their own personally.

A certain missionary was working in a rural African village that had no easy access to good drinking water. People walked for miles to the nearest river to get water. With his encouragement the



people undertook a self-help project to sink a borehole. The local government supplemented the people's efforts and a borehole was sunk in the village. In the meantime the missionary had left the village. Soon the village was enjoying fresh and clean drinking water from the borehole. So they wrote the missionary to come and see them and the great difference the borehole had made in the village. He went back to the village and rejoiced with them for the borehole that now gave fresh, clean water on demand. Then he decided to go round and visit some of his old friends. He entered the house of an old woman and asked her to give me a cup of the borehole water to drink. To his surprise she said that there was no drinking water in the house. "But the village now has water," he said. "Yes," she replied, "but the trouble is with my grandson who lives with me. I tell him to go and get water from the borehole and he wouldn't listen to me. All he does is run about and play."

There you are! You see, it is possible for someone to die of thirst in a village that has abundant drinking water. Why? Because there is no way the water out there in the borehole can become your own personally until you lift your foot to go there and draw the water that already belongs to you. The water in the borehole is yours by right. You are entitled to it. But you need to do something to claim this right before it can become your own personally, before it can actually quench your thirst. So is the good news of great joy that God showers on the world at Christmas. We still need to do something, make a little effort, before we can personally experience this joy in our lives, in our families, and in our world.

How do we do that? Well, that is rather easy to explain but pretty hard to practice, so I'll explain. Look at the word JOY. You see that it is made up of three letters: first J, then O, and lastly Y. J

stands for Jesus, O for Others, and Y for You. Joy therefore is: **Jesus, Others, before You.** To know joy in our lives we need to place Jesus first in everything. Secondly, we need to try to please others before trying to please yourself. That is the recipe for joy. That is how we can convert the Christmas "joy to the world" into a personal "joy in my life" now and always.

As we listen to the Christmas story we would do well to pay attention to the various people and groups of people that are mentioned and see whether they try to please Jesus and others before themselves, or whether they seek their own interests first. You will discover that those who practice J-O-Y are the ones who enjoy peace and joy, and that those who practice "self first" are always the unhappy and miserable ones. Here are a few examples.

On the negative side we have the innkeeper who turned Joseph and Mary out in the cold night while he enjoyed the warmth of the inn. There's also Herod who wanted above all his job security as king to the point that he was prepared to kill Jesus and others. These people never get to experience the joy of the good news. On the positive side, consider the shepherds who leave everything they own, their flock, in the bush and go to adore Jesus first. Or the magi, the wise men from the East who leave the security of their homeland and make a long and dangerous journey to Bethlehem just to worship the new-born Jesus and give him gifts. These are the ones who receive God's favour, the ones who experience in their hearts the true peace and joy of Christmas. Let us today resolve to follow their good example by always placing Jesus and others before self and then the joy of Christmas will always be ours.

## **"Trying to Enjoy the Season"**

Christmas Day Homily

**By Rev. Bruce Goettsche**

The Christmas Season is one of the most joyous times of the year. However, it can also be one of the most stressful times of the year. A number of years ago I wrote a poem that has been re-run and recited several times that began,

Away in a manger, I wish I were there;  
Away from the hustle and worry and care  
One "Silent Night" would be quite a sight  
But my schedule right now is simply too tight  
There's presents to buy and cards to send out  
Meetings and parties and greetings to shout  
Travel and family and eggnog to make  
Programs to go to and cookies to make  
Decorations to hang and carols to sing  
Christmas it seems has become a big "fling"

I think you might agree with those sentiments. Christmas can be one of the most stressful times we face -

- Financially. The way we celebrate Christmas costs money. There are presents for those you love, presents for those you want to thank, and presents for those who expect a gift. There are Christmas Cards, Entertainment obligations and the cost of decorations. The Christmas euphoria can give way to the January "sticker shock" and depression.
- Physically. Many times we feel Christmas is a time of non-stop activity. There are special programs, family gatherings,

parties, shopping trips. To be truthful, Christmas is often much more stressful on the woman (who make the meals and often buy the presents, than it is for men.)

- Emotionally. There is the agony of trying to find die right present for those special people in your life. There is a greater sense of loneliness at Christmas. Loss becomes more pronounced at Christmas. There is the emotional stress of having to deal with people (like relatives) that you don't particularly get along with. Even *the* emotional nature of the great story of Christmas (that God takes the form of man to rescue us) creates emotional stress of its own.

Let us look at Mary. How did she experience Christmas?

### *The Facts*

Nazareth, the home of Mary and Joseph was an interesting town. It wasn't a big town but it was a town that was acquainted with life. Just outside the town the main trade highway divided into three. Nazareth then became a very popular spot for travelers. Nazareth was also a popular meeting place for priests. The priestly work at the temple was divided between 24 groups (or teams) or priests. When their turn came they would all gather at a local town and travel to Jerusalem together. Nazareth was one of those towns. Nazareth was a place where the world and the temple met.

Now I know what you're minking. You say, "Who cares?" Let me give you my slant on things. The cosmopolitan nature of the town meant that no one in Nazareth was naive ... not even Mary. These were no gullible individuals. They knew what the real world was like. So when the angel told Mary she would bear

a son that was not born of her betrothed but of God, I think Mary knew exactly what the risks were.

Second, the strong tie to the temple meant that the moral awareness of people was heightened. A girl getting pregnant before her wedding... this was a shameful thing. I'm sure Mary wondered how she would handle the public scorn when word leaked out. And since Nazareth was a small town ... Word would leak out.

We easily forget that Mary was most likely a teenager when Gabriel came to her. What she was asked to do was extraordinary. By having a child at this point she was risking her health, her marriage (and perhaps any future hope of marriage), her reputation, possibly her family (who could always disown her for the disgrace), and there was a chance she could lose her life due to the charge of adultery. That is no easy request to handle for a teenager.

I admire Mary's faith. I wonder how this person (teenager or not) could handle such a mission as this. How did she "hold it all together?" How did she "keep perspective?" I know my situation and yours is nothing like Mary's ... however, what she learned might just be valuable to us.

### ***Mary Bought Time***

Mary was with Elizabeth for three months. Do you see the wisdom of this? Mary took time to think through her situation. She was willing to do whatever God asked of her...but she needed time to understand what she was agreeing to. I would suggest that during this time she planned what she would say to Joseph when she returned. Maybe she thought through what she would say to parents and friends.

I also think Mary used this time to pray. What an awesome responsibility to bear the Son of God. It is likely that the reason Mary left Elizabeth after the three months time was because John (the Baptist) was about to be born. The entire community would be coming to share in the joy. This was no place for a woman pregnant without a husband. I'm guessing that the embrace as they parted was long and emotion packed.

### *Mary Sought Counsel*

Mary went to see her relative (probably her aunt) Elizabeth. Let's face it, how would you tell your parents (and fiancé) what just happened to you? How do you think they would respond (how would you respond) if you said, "I saw an angel today and the angel told me that I was to be the mother of the Messiah."? You know how you would react. You'd suggest she get more rest, watch less late night television, stop hanging around with those religious extremists ... you would think she was a little crazy.

The angel makes it a point to mention Elizabeth. Who would better understand what she is going through? Elizabeth would understand. She too was involved in a supernatural pregnancy. Uncle Zechariah hadn't been able to speak since he reportedly saw an angel. If anyone would listen ... it would be Elizabeth. Elizabeth was older, wiser, the wife of a priest. Her counsel would be invaluable.

It turned out to be a good move. Can you imagine what it meant to Mary when Elizabeth sees her and says, "*Blessed are you among women and blessed is the child you will bear!*"? For Mary, it meant that she was not alone. Someone did understand, believe in and affirm her. The strength Mary gained from those words of Elizabeth are beyond our imagination.

## ***The Lessons***

This simple story of Mary after she heard the news from the angel Gabriel can teach us how to make sure the Christmas Season does not pass us by. Let me give you four principles:

### ***Step Back***

One of the best things we can do this Christmas is to step back and gain some perspective. We get so caught up in the details that it becomes difficult for us to see the big picture. We get so wrapped up in the preparations for the meal that we don't enjoy the people who are our greatest blessing.

We can become so consumed with our Christmas Lists that we forget WHY we are buying gifts in the first place. It is not supposed to be a "task to get done". Christmas is supposed to be a time to celebrate the life that God has made possible in Christ.

We need to find a few free moments to see the big picture. What do you want your Christmas Celebration to be? What are you looking for? In order to enjoy the season we have to ask, "What am I aiming for?" If we realized that what we want is to: celebrate the Father's love and to extend it to those around us ... then I think we would approach things differently. Take the time. Clarify your focus. Know what you are aiming for.

There was a wonderful illustration in this week's advent devotional,

**In** her book *Celebrate with Joy: Transform Your Christmas Season*, Sondra Burnett uses a pint jar, seven walnuts, and a cup of shelled sunflower seeds to illustrate why the Christmas you've always longed for doesn't happen for most of us. The jar represents

the season, the sunflower seeds everything we think we need to get done for Christmas to happen, and the walnuts represent everything actually essential to the true meaning of Christmas. She points out that when the jar is filled with sunflower seeds, there is no room for the walnuts. What we need to do is put the walnuts in first, then pour the sunflower seeds around them.

We need to step back and remind ourselves what the "walnuts" are in our lives.

### *Be Still*

Mary needed time to sort things out and to think... so do we. We need to build times of stillness into our lives. I have found that the times when I need to pray and study the most (when I am busiest) I tend to do it the least. This is not the right formula. It is in hectic times that we must be most disciplined in our quiet times.

A man was working in an ice plant amid the ice, and the sawdust in which it was stored, lost a valuable watch. His fellow workmen searched with him for more than two hours, but were unable to find it. They left the plant for lunch and returned to find a little boy with the watch in his hand. "How ever did you find it?" they inquired. He replied, "I just lay down in the sawdust and heard it ticking."

- *We find God in the same way ...* we have to be still and listen. With all the activity, the noise, the celebration it becomes hard to hear the "tick" of the Spirit.

If we want to enjoy this Christmas....if we want it to be the Christmas we always longed for, then we have to build times of stillness into it.



## *Have Fun*

Christmas is a celebration. Mary was originally afraid but then rejoiced at the honor that was hers. The Shepherds were afraid when they first saw the angels but after they had seen the Christ child they danced and told the world what they saw. So should we. Christmas is to be the time when we proclaim to the world the greatest news they could ever hear: God Cares!

Think about it ... Christmas reminds us that we are not biological accidents but people created by a Loving God for an eternal purpose. Christmas tells us that in a wicked world there is hope, in frightening times there is peace, in confusing times there is purpose.

There is no other time (with the possible exception of Easter) when the world seems most ready to hear the gospel than at Christmas. The message is in the songs around us, and on the specials we watch. It takes so little to ask, "Do you think people really understand what Christmas is all about?" Or "Have you ever thought about the implications of Jesus coming into the world?" Or "Have you ever wondered WHY God would become man?" Simple questions that can lead to incredible opportunities to share the good news.

You can see this season as a time of increasing burden or incredible opportunity. It can be a season to dread or to enjoy. It's all in your approach. So, I encourage you to build time for fun into your Christmas celebration. Sit down and watch a Christmas movie, even though you have seen it a hundred times before. Make popcorn. Decorate the tree. Sing carols. Entertain friends in simplicity and intimacy. Don't make it all so much work! Enjoy the celebration. Christmas is about GOOD news of great joy ... it is not something to endure, it is something to share.

## **How Much Time Do You Invest in your Family?**

Feast of the Holy Family

By Fr. Munachi E. Ezeogu, CSSP

A little boy greets his father as he returns from work with a question: "Daddy, how much do you make an hour?" The father is surprised and says: "Look, son, not even your mother knows. Don't bother me now, I'm tired." "But Daddy, just tell me please! How much do you make an hour?" the boy insists. The father finally gives up and replies: "Twenty dollars." "Okay, Daddy," the boy continues, "Could you loan me ten dollars?" The father yells at him: "So that was the reason you asked how much I earn, right? Now, go to sleep and don't bother me anymore!" At night the father thinks over what he said and starts feeling guilty. Maybe his son needed to buy something. Finally, he goes to his son's room. "Are you asleep, son?" asks the father. "No, Daddy. Why?" replies the boy. "Here's the money you asked for earlier," the father said. "Thanks, Daddy!" replies the boy and receives the money. The he reaches under his pillow and brings out some more money. "Now I have enough! Now I have twenty dollars!" says the boy to his father, "Daddy, could you sell me one hour of your time?" Today's gospel has a message for this man and for all of us, and the message is that we need to invest more of our time in our family life.

The gospel shows us Jesus at the age of twelve. That was the age that every Jewish boy was expected to make his bar mitzvah and so become a responsible subject of the law. It was a ceremony of legal adulthood. From then on he was required to keep the law and make the annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem like any other Jewish man. One way teenagers celebrate their coming of age is to go out

and do those things that the law had hitherto forbidden them to do. You know your boy is growing up when he stops asking where he came from and begins to not tell you where he is going. As we can see, Jesus was no exception. To celebrate his coming of age he attends the Temple Bible class without informing his parents. When his parents catch up with him after two days of searching for him everywhere, all he tells them is, **"Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?"** (Luke 2:49). Even holy families do have their occasional tensions and misunderstandings.

The most puzzling part of the story, however, is the way it ends: **"Then he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them"** (v.51). The twelve-year old adult Jesus already knows that his mission is to be in his Father's house and be about his Father's business. From the test-run he did in Jerusalem earlier that day, it was clear that he was already capable of doing it very well, because **"all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers"** (v. 47). The puzzle then is this: If Jesus, already at the age of twelve, was ready to begin his public mission, and was evidently well prepared for it, why would he go down with his parents and spend the next eighteen years in the obscurity of a carpenter's shed only to begin his public ministry at the age of thirty? Were those eighteen years wasted years? Certainly not! In a way that is hard for us to understand, Jesus' hidden life in Nazareth was as much a part of his earthly mission as his public life. We are reminded that it was at this time that **"Jesus increased in wisdom and in years, and in divine and human favour"** (v.52). And when we reflect on the fact that for every one year of his public life Jesus spent ten years in family life, then we shall begin to understand the importance and priority he gave to family life.

We have two lives, a private or family life and a public or professional one. These two lives should be in harmony but very often they are in tension. Whereas Jesus resolved the tension by giving priority to his private life, we, unfortunately, often try to resolve it by giving priority to our professional life, leaving our family life to suffer. Rose Sands writes about the unhappy man who thought the only way he could prove his love for his family was to work hard. "To prove his love for her, he swam the deepest river, crossed the widest desert and climbed the highest mountain. She divorced him. He was never home." The celebration today of the holy family of Joseph, Mary and Jesus reminds and challenges us to value and invest in our private life with our families before our professional life at the work place, even when our job is as important as saving the world.

### **New Resolution with Mary**

Solemnity of the Motherhood of Mary

By Fr. Munachi E. Ezeogu, cssp

The name "January" comes from the Roman god Janus, the god with two faces, one looking to the past and the other looking to the future. This is indeed a time to look back at the year that has just ended and to look forward to the new year ahead of us. How did I spend this one year of my life that has just passed? Did I use it to advance my goals and objectives in life? Did I use it to enhance the purpose of my existence? Could I have done better last year in the way I invested my time between the demands of work, family, friends and society, and the demands of my spiritual life? What things did I achieve last year and what did I fail to achieve? How can I consolidate the achievements of last year while reversing

the failures and losses in this new year? Through soul searching questions like these we find that a review of the past year naturally leads to setting goals and resolutions for the new year.

There are people who tell you that there is no point making new year resolutions. Do not believe them. We must set goals and make resolutions as a necessary conclusion to our review of the past year. And we do need to review our lives from year to year because, as Socrates says, the unexamined life is not worth living.

Today's newspapers are full of individual and collective new year resolutions. Most of those, however, are not resolutions at all but only wishes. What is the difference between a resolution and a wish? A wish identifies a goal one wants to reach, a resolution specifies the steps one will take to reach it. A wish says this is where I want to be, a resolution says this is the road I will take, this is what I will do to get there. The wishful person says "I want to pass my exams this year" and the resolved person says "I will devote an extra hour to my studies everyday in order to pass my exams." The wishful person says "I will have more peace and love in my family this year" and the resolved person says "I will spend more time with my family at table instead of rushing off to the TV, so that we get to know and understand ourselves better." The wishful person says "I will live a life of union with God this year" and the resolved person says "I will set aside this time everyday to pray and hear God's word." The difference between wishing and resolving is: are we prepared to do what it takes to make our dreams come true, are we prepared to pay the price?

The gospel today presents Mary to us as a model of that new life in Christ that all of us wish for ourselves in the new year. There we see that Mary was prepared to do something to realize this goal. What did she do? We read that the shepherds, when they

went to adore the Child Jesus in the manger, told all that the angels had said to them. **"But Mary treasured all these words and pondered them in her heart"** (Luke 2:19). Again after the boy Jesus was found in the Temple, we are told that **"His mother treasured all these things in her heart"** (Luke 2:51). Mary was a woman who valued the word of God, who treasured it and made time to meditate and ponder it. It is true that the holiness of Mary is attributed to the grace of God, but this should not make us forget that she needed to make an effort in order to cooperate with the grace of God. She pondered the word of God in order to discern what God was saying to her at every stage in her life as the handmaid of God.

The two examples above of Mary pondering the word of God, namely, after the visit of the shepherds and after the finding in the temple, show that Mary found the word of God both in divine revelation (the angels' words to the shepherds) and in her own experiences (her encounter with her son in the temple). Similarly God speaks to us today through divine revelation (e.g. the Bible, the teaching and preaching of the Church) as well as through our personal experiences, if only we made time to reflect on them as Mary did.

Whatever the situation in which we find ourselves - a hardship, a disappointment, a decision to make - God has a solution, an answer that is right for us. We tell God about it in prayer but we also listen to what God has to tell us about it. Prayer is a conversation with God but sometimes all we do is pick up the phone, read out the list of our problems to God and drop the phone without listening to hear what God has to say to us. Let us today resolve to listen more to the voice of God, to treasure God's word and ponder it in our hearts. Then shall we be able to realize our new year resolution of a new life in union with God.

## *ARTICLES*

### **Taking Sides**

**ALBERT NOLAN, OP**

We live today in a world of conflict, between governments and the peace movements, between trade unions, and employers, between feminists and male-dominated institutions. In El Salvador and Guatemala conflicts between the rich and the poor cost countless lives. In South Africa the situation has been described as a total conflict, and military chiefs have called it total war.

There may be differences of opinion about the nature of a particular conflict, whether it is a radical conflict or a class conflict, or whether the conflict might be resolved by peaceful negotiation rather than the use of force. But for many people in the world the fact of a conflict, which may encompass every aspect of their lives, can hardly be doubted.

#### ***Taking Sides***

This poses very important questions for us as Christians. What should be our attitude to the conflicts in which we find ourselves and which we see around us? Should we take sides or must we always remain neutral?

It is as well to make it clear from the start that these questions are distinct from the question of using or not using violence. People in Northern Ireland, for example, may hope fervently for a united Ireland or for continued union with Britain - they may, in other words, 'take sides' - while rejecting the use of violence to achieve it. We are not discussing here the question of whether or not there are occasions when the use of violence in pursuit of justice is justified. In countries like EL Salvador, Guatemala and South Africa it is often almost impossible to disentangle the question of taking sides and the question of violence, but it is nonetheless a separate question and one that has to be talked about quite separately in the light of the gospel.

**To many of us it is pretty obvious that there are some conflicts in which we ought to take sides. But what about the Christian belief in reconciliation, forgiveness and peace? How can you take sides if you love everybody, including your enemies? And how do we account for the widespread belief that in any conflict a Christian should be a peacemaker who avoids taking sides and tries to bring about a reconciliation between the opposing forces?**

**This belief rests on a mistaken understanding of reconciliation.** We have all heard people say: We must be fair, we must listen to both sides of the story; there is always right and wrong on both sides. If we could only get people to talk to one another to sort out their misunderstandings and misconceptions of one another the conflict could be resolved. On the face of it this sounds very Christian. It sounds like a genuine concern for fairness and justice.



### *Three Common Mistakes*

So what is wrong with this argument?

**In the first place it makes reconciliation an absolute principle that must be applied in all cases of conflict.** The model or example that it envisages is that of what one might call the 'private quarrel' between two people who are being argumentative and not trying to understand one another and whose differences are based upon misunderstandings. But not all conflicts are like this. In some conflicts one side is right and the other wrong, one side is unjust and oppressive and the other is suffering injustice and oppression. In such cases a policy of seeking consensus and not taking sides would be quite wrong. Christians are not supposed to try to reconcile good and evil, justice and injustice; we are supposed to do away with evil, injustice and sin.

The first mistake, then, is the assumption that all conflicts are based upon misunderstandings and that there is always blame on both sides. There is no evidence for believing that this is always the case, either in conflicts between individuals or in conflicts between groups in society. It is an unfounded assumption that has nothing whatsoever to do with Christianity. **It is an assumption that could only be made by people who do not suffer under injustice and oppression or who do not really appreciate the sinfulness and evil of what is happening.**

**The second mistake in this argument is that it assumes that a person can be neutral in all cases of conflict.** In fact, neutrality is not always possible, and in cases of conflict due to injustice and oppression neutrality is totally impossible. If we do not take sides with the oppressed, then we are, albeit

unintentionally, taking sides with the oppressor. 'Bringing the two sides together' in such cases is actually extremely beneficial to the oppressor, because it enables the status quo to be maintained; it hides the true nature of the conflict; keeps the oppressed quiet and passive and it brings about a kind of pseudo-reconciliation without justice. The injustice continues and everybody is made to feel that the injustice doesn't matter because the tension and conflict have been reduced.

This brings us to the third mistake. **The commonly held view that Christians should always seek harmony and a 'middle way' in every dispute assumes that tension and conflict are worse evils than injustice and oppression.** This again is a false supposition based upon a lack of compassion for those who suffer under oppression. Those who are afraid of conflict or confrontation, even when it is non-violent, are usually those who are not convinced of the need for change. Their caution hides an unchristian pessimism about the future, a lack of hope. Or they use the Christian concern for reconciliation to justify a form of escapism from the realities of injustice and conflict.

All in all, these mistakes about Christian reconciliation are not simply a matter of misunderstandings but come from a lack of real love and compassion for those who are suffering, or from a lack of appreciation of what is really happening in a grave conflict. In the final analysis, the insistent pursuit of an illusory neutrality in every conflict is a way of siding with the oppressor.

### ***True Reconciliation***

What then is the true meaning of reconciliation? What does reconciliation mean in the Bible?

The history of the Jewish people in the Bible is very much a history of conflict with the pagan nations. This conflict and confrontation is not merely encouraged by God, he actually commands the people again and again to oppose the tyranny and injustice and immorality of the pagan nations. One of the greatest sins of the Jewish nation was their attempt to be reconciled with the pagan nations who oppressed them. When the people shouted 'Peace, peace,' Jeremiah responds by saying there is no peace and never can be peace without change or conversion.

Some people today ignore this because they say that the New Testament is different and that Jesus brought a message of peace and reconciliation. It is of course true that one of the things that Jesus wished to hand on to his disciples was his peace, and that he said: 'Blessed are the peacemakers,' but this must be understood in the context of the much more remarkable saying we inherit from Jesus in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

'Do you suppose that I am here to bring peace on earth?' (The question is interesting. It seems to suggest that there were people who dis 'suppose' that Jesus had come to bring peace on earth.) 'No, I tell you, but rather dissension. For from now on a household will be divided: three against two, and two against three: the father divided against the son, son against father, mother against daughter, daughter against mother; mother-in-law against daughter-in-law, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law (Lk. 12:51-53; Mt. 10:34-36).

Most of this is a quotation from the prophet Micah (7:6) who was deploring the conflict between parents and children. Jesus used the quote to say that this is just the kind of conflict and dissension that he will bring. And of course this is exactly what he did. Not because he wanted to bring dissension and conflict for

their own sake, but because his uncompromising stance inevitably divided the people into those who were for him and those who were against him.

Moreover, in the already existing conflict between Pharisees and the so-called 'sinners' he sided with the sinners, prostitutes and tax-collectors against the Pharisees. And in the conflict between the rich and the poor he sided with the poor. Jesus did not treat each side as equally right or equally wrong, or only needing to overcome their misunderstandings about one another. He condemn the Pharisees and the rich in no uncertain terms, and he forgave the sinners and blessed the poor. In fact he enters right into the conflict with the Pharisees and the rich to such an extent that they set out to discredit him, arrest him, charge him and execute him. Jesus made no attempt to compromise with the authorities for the sake of a false peace or reconciliation or unity.

On the other hand there are times when Jesus tried to reconcile people who have been in conflict with one another, e.g. Jews and Samaritans, Zealots and tax-collectors some individual Pharisees and sinners of the poor, etc. and it was probably for this reason that he was known as a man of peace.

But how is one to reconcile these two apparently contradictory approaches to conflict?

Jesus made a distinction between the peace that God wants, and the peace that the world wants (Jn 14:27). The peace that God wants is a peace that is based on truth, justice and love. The peace that the world offers us is a superficial peace and unity that compromises the truth, that covers over the injustices and that is usually settled on for thoroughly selfish purposes. Jesus destroys this false peace and even highlights the conflicts in order to promote

a true and lasting peace. There is no question of preserving peace and unity at all costs, even at the cost of truth and justice. Rather it is a matter of promoting truth and justice at all costs, even at the cost of creating conflict and dissension along the way.

Thomas Aquinas makes this same point by distinguishing between peace and concord, pointing out that concord is possible between thieves and murderers but that true peace is based upon genuine love.

### *Different Kinds of Conflict*

We noted before that there are different kinds of conflict. We must analyze each situation and respond accordingly. If one side is right we must recognize this and side with them. If the other side is wrong and in power, we must oppose them and dethrone them from power. Furthermore we must analyze the reasons for the conflict, the interests that are at stake and the dynamics of change through conflict. **The idea that all one has to do is talk nicely to both sides and they will be reconciled is simply not true in most cases of conflict, especially conflicts between groups or interests rather than individuals. There are often social forces at play that make change and conflict much more difficult and complicated than that.**

On the other hand we may discover that both sides are basically right, that both sides are working for justice. In such cases reconciliation is very important in order to create a cooperative solidarity in the struggle against injustice. And if we discover that both sides are wrong and that both are part of the oppression, then both must be confronted. And then, obviously, we don't try to reconcile them in their differences about the most effective way to oppress others.

## ***Structural Conflict***

It is very important to realize that to get to the real root of many conflicts we have to begin to think in structural terms - in other words, that not just individuals may be right or wrong, but the way societies are structured may itself be right or wrong. In some cases there is a structural conflict between the oppressor and the oppressed, between the rich and the poor. It is not a personal squabble. In these cases we cannot and should not impute guilt to the individuals concerned, nor should we treat everyone on the one side as blameless and everyone on the other side as guilty.

Thus in the Magnificat or Song of Mary in the gospel of Luke, Mary says that it is God who 'pulls down the mighty from their thrones and exalts the lowly, who fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty' (Lk 1:52-53). This does not mean that God hates the rich and the powerful and that he wants to destroy them as people. It simply means that he wants to pull the rich and the powerful from their thrones, from their position in society, because the structures of that society are unjust and oppressive.

This is the sense in which we must be on the side of the poor if we want to be on God's side. We must take an option for the poor, for the sake of both the poor and the rich as individual people. In fact, within this situation of structural conflict the only way to love everyone is to side with the poor and the oppressed. Anything else is simply a way of siding with oppression and injustice.

## ***Loving Our Enemies***

**This brings us to the question of loving our enemies. Here we must first point out that the commandment to love one's**

**enemies only makes sense once we recognize that we do have enemies, and that they are really and truly our enemies. When people hate you and curse you and oppress you, Jesus does not say that you must pretend that they are not your enemies. They are. And when he says you must love them despite this, he does not mean that you must avoid any conflict or confrontation with them.**

Those who maintain an unjust distribution of wealth and power and those who prop their thrones are in fact our enemies. They are everybody's enemies; they are even the enemies of their own humanity. As a group or class they will never come down from their thrones willingly or voluntarily. A few individuals here and there may do so, but there will always be others to replace them. The ruling class as a whole cannot step down: we will have to pull them down from their thrones. Not in order to sit on those thrones ourselves, or to put others on them, but in order to destroy thrones.

The temptation for a Christian is to think that the most loving thing to do is to convert those who sit on the thrones of injustice and thus to destroy the system. But change does not happen that way, because as long as the throne remains it will always be filled by others and the oppression will remain. The only effective way of loving our enemies is to engage in action that will destroy the system that makes them our enemies. In other words, for the sake of love and for the sake of true peace, we must side with the poor and the oppressed and confront the rich and powerful and join the conflict or struggle against them, or rather against what they stand for and what they are defending.

**In countries marked by grave injustice, joining the conflict, not judging it from a distance, is the only effective**

**way of bringing about the peace that God wants.** To take an example closer to home: in countries possessing nuclear weapons, there may be no short cut around conflict with governments if the world is to progress towards disarmament. It is not possible to 'balance' or 'reconcile' the needs of the forty million people who dies from starvation each year in the Third World with the needs of arms manufacturers and military strategies or the demands of a few wealthy nations to be able to destroy any potential attacker many times over. Decisions have to be made; one has to 'take sides.'

From a pamphlet published by the  
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Relations (CIIR) and the Catholic  
Truth Society (CTS)



# **The Surrender of the Catholic Church**

FR. JOSEPH K. HORN

*St. Barbara's Parish*

*Santa Ana, CA*

I have bad news, and I have good news. First, the bad news. Open any newspaper; it's *all* bad news! People tell me that the news is so horrifying because that's what sells. Of course that's right to some extent, but some of the things happening these days would have been unthinkable before.

Parents throwing their children off a bridge or driving them into a lake. Children killing their parents. Teenagers killing each other to get their shoes or a stereo or just for fun. A man is caught trying to cash a stolen check, and while fleeing the scene, kills three innocent people, one of whom is a baby. A terrorist insists that his diatribes be published or else he will kill more people with bombs. A night clerk on his very first night at work is shot by a robber. I could go on and on, like the newspapers do, but it's too depressing, and

although it's in the papers because it sells, it is happening, and that's what depresses me. But there's something else that's even more depressing. It's the answer to the following question.

**Where did this wholesale contempt for life come from?**

Why are more and more people losing every shred of respect for the sanctity of human life? Whatever happened to the powerful influence that the Church once had, acting as a leaven, imbuing the entire nation with a profound reverence and appreciation for life? The Church used to be central to the life of the country, even to non-Catholics. Bishop Sheen was watched and admired by millions of viewers, most of whom were non-Catholics. The Church was a real and effective force in society, always the leader in matters of the most fundamental human right of all: the right to life.

What happened? I'll tell you what happened. You're not going to like to hear it, but I'll tell you what happened. What happened is this: **We surrendered.** We Catholics surrendered. We surrendered in the war against evil. And here's why. *We were so desperate to be like everybody else that we stopped being us.* We stopped believing the core tenets of our Catholic faith, and the world noticed. While we argued among ourselves about whether or not the Pope was right regarding birth control, the world watched. They listened as we fought among ourselves about abortion, about ordaining women, about homosexuality, about all kinds of things, and the world saw us bickering, and said to itself, "We're supposed to consider these people to be great spiritual leaders? They can't even lead themselves!"

You want proof? Here's proof. The *Orange County Register* ran an article entitled, "Religion Watch: How Catholics Feel About Being Catholic." They asked a bunch of Catholics whether or not they agreed with various Catholic teachings. The tallied results of this survey are stupefying. They asked whether a Catholic can never go to confession and still be a good Catholic, and 66% said Yes. Is the Church wrong about abortion? 58% said Yes. Is the Church wrong about sex outside of marriage? 48% said Yes. Is the Church wrong not to ordain women as priests? 63% say Yes. Is the Church wrong about artificial birth control? A mind-boggling 84% said Yes! Is the Church wrong about attending Mass? 67% said Yes. Is the Church wrong not to allow priests to marry? 75% said Yes. When asked whether they believe sexual abuse of young people by priests to be isolated incidents or widespread, the majority replied: Widespread.

Think that's depressing? Here's the *coup de grace*. When asked whether they follow the Pope on difficult moral issues, or if they follow their own feelings instead, 16% said that they follow the Pope, leaving 84% of all American Roman Catholics following their own feelings! We are sheep who have abandoned our shepherd, each going his own way!

Is it any wonder then that the world has lost all respect for us and our values? No wonder they pay no attention to the Church's call to respect life when we ourselves have no respect for our own Church!

The oldest military strategy in the world is Divide and Conquer. If you can scatter the enemy, you can defeat them. Why are we allowing ourselves to be divided and conquered? A house divided against itself cannot stand, and let me tell you, I look at this survey, and I can't stand it! I know in faith that the Roman Catholic Church is protected by God's special grace, and that the gates of Hell shall never prevail against it, but there is no such promise for the American Catholic Church. Look what happened to the Catholic Church in France after the Revolution. Look what happened to the Catholic Church in Europe and Asia when so many countries fell under the atheistic hammer and sickle. Do we naively fancy that it can't happen here? It most certainly can! It's happening already!

Now you may say, hey, Father Joe, it's okay to disagree with the Church as long as you remain faithful to it. If the Church were a club, I'd agree with you. But the Church is a faith community. It is our faith that makes us Catholics. And that faith is not a feeling; it's a precise set of core beliefs. Over the centuries many saints have held fast to those beliefs, and even been martyred because they refused to waver on even one tenet of our faith, and they now enjoy eternal bliss in heaven. On the other hand, over the centuries there have been those who caved in to the pressures of society, who abandoned their faith, who appeased the enemies of the Church in a misguided attempt to make everybody and everything look good. What was their fate? One can only guess.

Okay; at the beginning I said I had bad news and good news. You've heard the bad news; now here's the good news. A lot of American Catholics today say that they disagree with the Church, when in fact they don't. There are two reasons for this. Sometimes they are *confusing disagreement with discomfort*. The Church's teachings about sexuality or contraception or confession (or whatever) makes them uncomfortable, and without any further thought, they say, "I disagree with the Church." They never really think it through; they have no intellectual argument at all. They just don't *like* it. So they say that they disagree. If this sounds like you, welcome back. You never really disagreed at all. There are a lot of Church teachings that make *me* very uncomfortable too. So what? Seat belts make me uncomfortable, but I always wear 'em. And so do you.

The other group of people who say that they disagree with the Church but in fact don't are *confusing disagreement with non-comprehension*. Many people have no idea *why* the Church teaches what it teaches, and since they don't know the reason, they illogically assume that there *is* no reason, and so they say, "I disagree." They think that if they don't fully understand something, then they have to reject it. If this sounds like you, welcome back. You never really disagreed at all. There are a lot of Church teachings that I don't fully understand either. So what? I don't understand the doctrine of the Trinity, but I don't disagree with it. And neither do you.

My dear friends, some day the Roman Catholic Church will once again be 100% in union with the Pope, 100% faithful, 100% united, hand in hand, forming an unbreakable life chain from coast to coast, and making a positive impact on society. Let's pray hard and work hard towards that goal by being good, faithful, orthodox Catholics ourselves.

# Being Christian in Times of Crisis

**DONALD B. STROBE**

*The Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies*

The following is the lead paragraph of a magazine article:

"Not in the lifetime of most men has there been so much grave and deep apprehension. The domestic economic situation is in chaos. Our dollar is weak throughout the world. Prices are so high as to be utterly impossible. Of our troubles man can see no end."

What is the magazine? Time? Newsweek? U.S. News and World Report? No, it is from an article in Harper's Weekly in the year **1857!**

For some reason people have always believed the present time in which they live to be the time of greatest crisis in the history of the world. This morning, I would like to suggest that there at least three things we can do in times of crisis:

## */. In a Time of Crisis, Some People Break Down*

I must admit that they have good reason today! I recall seeing a poster a few years back which made a play on Kipling's famous

inspirational poem "IF", which said: "If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs, it just might be that you do not understand the true situation!"

There are certainly a lot of terrible things happening in our world today that are a cause for deep concern: in addition to the fear of terrorism, we are in the midst of an economic recession, many have had their retirement investments wiped out, unemployment is on the rise, the newspapers and television bring us fresh doses of bad news every day.

But despite our economic problems, many of us have more than enough to live on. The big question is: **what do we have to live for?**

Dr. Karl Menninger of the famous Menninger Clinic said that when we feel on the verge of a breakdown, the best thing we can do is to go out and help somebody else! The neurotic is a person all wrapped up in self, and a person all wrapped up in self makes a pretty small package.

It has often been said that Christians ought to live each day as though it might be their last. A humorist commented; "Live each day as though it will be your last, and one of these days, you'll be right!" That is true.

I recall when I began a speech in which I said, "If we die..." but then suddenly realized that there is no "if" about it. All of us are going to die! Nobody gets out of this life alive.

There is a story of a priest who announced to his congregation one Sunday: "Every member of this parish will one day die!" To which a fellow in the back row let out a mild chuckle. The priest was taken aback, and reprimanded the fellow for laughing at what



he thought was a solemn moment. He asked him, "Why did you *laugh when I said that each member of mis parish will one day die?*" The fellow replied, "Father, I'm not a member of this parish!"

Life is terminal for all of us. And the real question is not how many years we can put into our lives, but how much life we can put into our years. It is not morbid to remember that we are mortal.

The Apostle Paul says: "*We are always facing death, but this means that you know more and more of life; and we know for certain that he who raised the Lord Jesus from death shall also raise us with Jesus. We shall all stand together before him. This is the reason why we never collapse. The outward man does indeed suffer wear and tear, but every day the inward man receives fresh strength.*" (II Corinthians 4:12-17)

That's the way it is supposed to be for Christians. Each of us suffers wear and tear, but we are hooked up to a God who continually renews us day by day, and will raise us up at the last day to be with Him.

## **17. *In Times of Crisis, Some People Break Out***

They push the panic button, throw overboard their morals, their values, their principles. Some even throw overboard their **faith**.

One of the greatest sermons ever preached, is titled "But When Life Tumbles In, What men?" It was preached by the great Scots preacher Arthur John Gossip on the Sunday following his wife's sudden death. He said, "So many people's religion is a fair-weather affair. A little rain, and it runs and crumbles; a touch of strain, and it snaps ... So long as God's will runs parallel to ours, we follow blithely. But the moment they cross, or clash, then life

grows difficult. We don't understand why faith seems to fail us just when we have most need of it!

"... I do not understand this life of ours. But still less can I comprehend how people in trouble can run away peevishly from the Christian Faith. In God's name, run to what? Haven't we lost enough without losing that, too?

"... You people in the sunshine may believe the faith, but we in the shadow **must** believe it. We have nothing else."\*

I might wish to argue with Dr. Gossip about the notion that everything that happens is the will of God. I find that idea more akin to the theology of Islam than of Christianity. After all, our Lord taught us to pray "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven," which says to me that God's will is **not** yet done on this earth, and that God is counting on us to help it to get done. Still, Gossip is right for the most part, and his famous sermon has brought comfort to millions.

When we have lost so much, how terrible it is to lose God as well. When confronted with crisis, some folks throw overboard their faith. They think that Christian life is full of misery and pain.

In the musical *Man of La Mancha* there is a song about Don Quixote calling him "The Knight of a Woeful Countenance." But Jesus would never fit that description. The primary criticism of Jesus by his opponents was that He seemed to be having much too much fun to be a real rabbi! Yes, He was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief as Scripture tells us, but at the same time the main impression He had on His contemporaries was that of a

\* From *The Protestant Pulpit*, New York and Nashville: Abingdon Press, Copyright MCMXLVII, A.W. Blackwood, editor, pp. 199, 201.

Man who was filled with radiance and joy. And He promised that we, too, could share in that joy. (Cf. Mt. 25:21, Jn. 15:11)

So I do not believe that the Christian Life is a joyless, gloomy existence. It is precisely the opposite. But there is such a thing as a Christian morality, a morality we must not abandon, even in times of crisis. Christian morality insists on the divine worth of persons. All persons. Not just the persons we happen to like. "Sin" is a word which has become devalued and misunderstood in our modern world. For most folks, it has a sexual connotation. But it is far more than that. Whenever we devalue persons, dehumanize them, or treat them as expendable, then we are guilty of sin.

Reuel Howe, the Episcopal clergyman who taught so many of us so many things in the last century said, "God made persons and God made things. God made things to be used and persons to be loved. Sin consists in loving things and using persons."

Some of us are old enough to remember the panic which overtook America when it was discovered that the Soviet Empire had nuclear weapons. People even began to dig fallout shelters in their backyards! At the time I remember reading one so-called "Christian" ethicist who actually defended the right of a Christian to shoot down neighbors who might want to get into one's personal bomb-shelter. He said that, in an emergency, survival is more important than the Sermon on the Mount. I am sure that our Lord would be interested in learning that fact!

Times of crisis do funny things to our morality. In reply, Episcopal Bishop Angus Dun said some wise words that not only had relevance to the crisis of that time, but also to the crises of our own very different time: "I do not see how any Christian conscience can condone a plan which puts supreme emphasis on saving your

own skin, without regard to the plight of your neighbor. Justice, mercy, and brotherly love do not cease to operate, even in the final apocalypse. It would be infinitely better to go down decently to the final end than to survive as less-than-human creatures." Wise words, and challenging ones for our day, as well.

In our attempts to fight our enemies, we must not become like our enemies.

Years ago a strange religious group migrated to Canada called the Doukhobors. They were an independent religious sect originating in Russia in the 18th century, believing in the supreme authority of the inner voice and in the transmigration of souls, rejecting the divinity of Christ and the establishing of churches, and expressing opposition to civil authority by refusing to pay taxes, do military service, etc. They had an interesting way of practicing civil disobedience and resistance to authority. When confronted with civil authority, they removed their clothing!

Now, according to one story, a Canadian policeman attempted to arrest them for going around naked. But they began to run, and being stripped down as they were, they were more streamlined and able to outrun the policeman. So the policeman began to shed some of his paraphernalia to try to capture them. He took off his heavy gun belt, hat, jacket, shirt, trousers, etc. until he ended up as naked ... as a Doukhobor.

The only problem was: when he captured them, *what was he going to arrest them for?* There is a point to this odd story and that is, **if we become as bad as our enemies in fighting our enemies, then our enemies have won!**

In times of crisis, some folks throw overboard their faith, some throw overboard their morals; others are willing to throw

overboard their **freedom**. This has particular relevance for those of us who live in the twenty-first century, doesn't it?

We are in the midst of a continuing debate on the subject of how much freedom we might be willing to give up in order to obtain more security from terrorism. Recently, in the middle of this debate I heard someone quote Benjamin Franklin to the effect that "He who surrenders his liberty in order to obtains security will end up with neither liberty nor security." And so I think that we must continually strive to keep a balance between freedom and security. Today, there are not only political but religious movements afoot in our land and in every denomination which would put restrictions on a free press, a free pulpit, and freedom of inquiry. I believe that these movements are dangerous, and that God does not ask us to park our brains outside the Church when we come to worship.

I know that it is very attractive to believe that some particular groups have all of the answers and that some questions are simply not up for debate, but I believe that it is far better to debate an issue without settling it than to settle an issue without debating it!

We must safeguard our freedom of expression not only as a nation, but within our churches, where there are myriads of movements today trying to enforce a theological or social "orthodoxy" and "political correctness" on us. We live in an age, as Martin Marty once said, where "the tolerant are uncommitted and the committed are intolerant."

I do not believe that commitment has to mean intolerance. I am firmly committed to Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior, and I believe in the historic, classical, Christian Faith; but I have also come to believe that Christian "orthodoxy" is much broader than

many folks today think it is, and I subscribe to the famous dictum of John Wesley: "As to opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think." Of course, the difficulty is that many of us disagree on what opinions "strike at the root" of our faith. I have often said that I would be willing to be a "fundamentalist" if you would let me choose the fundamentals! But the most dangerous threat to the church today, I believe, is the brittleness of our belief, the incivility of our discussions of controversial issues, our unwillingness to disagree without being disagreeable, and the willingness of so many to cast those with whom they do not agree into outer darkness.

***///. What Shall Christians Do, Then, in Times of Crisis?  
We Must Not Break Down, or Break Out, but rather  
Break Through - to God!***

As Harry Emerson Fosdick said in a hymn, we need to have a great faith "for the living of these days." We need to hear the words of another hymn which says: *"Oh where are kings and empires now, of old that went and came? But Lord, Thy church is praying yet, a thousand years the same."*

Well, not quite the same - but close. Remembering the mighty empires of Rome, Egypt, Babylonia, Assyria and Greece, which seemed so all-powerful at the time, but which all went down the drain of history, Martin Luther wrote these magnificent words: *"So they puff themselves up by their power alone, and everybody supposes them to have won, when God pricks the bubble, and it is all over!"*

A more modern version of that faith is summed up in this doggerel verse:

My granddad, viewing earth's worn cogs,  
Said things were going to the dogs;  
His granddad in his house of logs,  
Said things were going to the dogs;  
His granddad in Flemish bogs,  
Said things were going to the dogs,  
His granddad in his old skin togs  
Said things were going to the dogs,  
There's one thing that I have to state...  
The dogs have had a good long wait!

No, the world isn't going to the dogs. The Bible tells us that it is going to God. It may be going there by a mighty circuitous route, but it is going there! And that is the faith that gives us hope, even in times of crisis!

Sometimes we imagine that it must have been easier, back in "the good old days," whenever that was. There is a sentimental old Sunday School song which talked about Jesus' world, and then had the refrain, "How I would like to have been with Him then."

I am not so sure that we would have liked it. It was a cold, heartless, cruel world, filled with political upheavals, terrorism, epidemics, crises on every side. But Jesus rose above it - and so did those who followed Him. Paul wrote, *"We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed"* (II Cor. 4:8-9)

J. B. Phillips translated those words: *"We may be knocked down, but we are not knocked out!"*

Isn't that great! Four times in a row, Paul uses that glorious word "but." That word contains the New Testament proclamation

*of hope. Christians may suffer setbacks - BUT that doesn't exhaust God's possibilities. On that first Good Friday, "Pilate set a seal upon the tomb." BUT "on the first day of the week, the stone was rolled away!" So we do not lose heart. We believe that God is at work - even in times of crisis.*

Wendell Phillips, that great 19th century orator and opponent of slavery, one day sat by a fireside talking with a young friend about his own younger years. The veteran abolitionist completely lost himself in the thrilling tale of the struggle for freedom and abolition of slavery in the United States. The youth sat enthralled, then, under the spell of the stories, he rose to leave.

"Mr. Phillips," he said, as he took the old man's hand, "If I had lived in your time, I think I would have been heroic, too!"

This aroused the ire of the old man, who accompanied the boy to the door with these words: "YOUNG MAN, YOU **ARE** LIVING IN MY TIME. AND IN GOD'S TIME. BE SURE OF THIS - NO MAN WOULD HAVE BEEN HEROIC THEN WHO IS NOT HEROIC NOW! GOOD NIGHT!

How shall we live in times of crisis? Why, the same way we live in all other times: as Christians, by the grace of God. Amen.



# Reflections on the Role of Bishops in Philippine Politics

†LEONARDO Z. LEGASPI, O.P., D.D.

## *Who We Are*

I start my reflections with the latest CBCP Statement entitled: *Restoring Trust: A Plea for Moral Values in Philippine Politics*.

In this Pastoral Statement, the bishops ask themselves: "As Bishops what can we offer to our people? Can we provide some clarity and guidance in the present confusing situation?" Then, the bishops give their answer. They reply: "We can only answer these questions from who we are."

"From who we are." This response is an emphatic reminder that the only way bishops can give credible and authentic clarity and guidance to a confused people is by manifesting in their words and actions *who they are*. Our people want to know whence comes that identity which determines the teaching and shapes the decisions of their bishops.

For today, this Episcopal identity is not clear to our people. Bishops do not present a homogeneous, clearly identifiable character of who they are to our people. They read of dissent among the bishops; they listen to statements of bishops which they consider as highly political while noting the silence of other bishops; they see bishops with different preferential options, some for the rich and powerful others for the poor and powerless. They wonder why those bishops engaged in lonely battles against moral corruption seem to be without the support of other bishops. They know that bishops have different views on whether or not to ask for the resignation of the President. They hear of bishops telling media that they miss the high-profile interventions of Cardinal Sin in political issues. Have bishops, then, become part of the problem and thereby bring about confusion and demoralization among our people?

"...Who we are." What then is a bishop? The Post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Gregis* answers: "The Bishop, who acts in the person and name of Christ Himself, becomes in the Church entrusted to him a living sign of the Lord Jesus, Shepherd and Spouse, Teachers and High Priest of the Church." (No. 7). The key then to the Bishops' identity and mission is the mystery of the Christ and the attributes willed by the Lord Jesus for his Church, "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit" (LG, 27). In the light of the mystery of Christ, the Bishop comes to understand ever more profoundly the mystery of the Church, in which he, by the grace of Episcopal ordination, has been appointed as teacher, priest and shepherd so as to guide the Church with the power the Bishop has received.

## ***Gospel Defines Bishops' Identity***

Observe that the three functions are linked to a unique context, namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. If these three functions lose their anchorage in the Gospels, they can be used to reinforce the image of the Church as an authoritarian institution where students fear teachers, where priests monopolize decisions, where those who govern become tyrants. But this is a caricature of the true goal of these functions which is that the Bishop's teaching imitates the patience of the Teacher-Rabbi who chose ambitious and cowardly fishermen as His first disciples; that his priestly work is modeled on the suffering Messiah and that his governance must reflect the humility of the Master who serves His disciples. In the reform and renewal of our nation's political culture, Bishops have an indispensable role. He is the teacher of God's mode of transforming humanity. He is the priest who gathers us for a covenant meal with God. He is the leader whose *diakonia* is one of humble service.

We have pointed to the Gospel as the context which gives birth to the triple functions which define the relationship of Bishops to the People of God. But these functions do not operate in a vacuum. They are affected by a context whose social, economic and political dimensions have consequences for the implementation of his mandate. This is the context of culture the culture into which he was born and which has formed and continues to form him as a human person.

The bishop is not only a citizen of the City of God but he also is a citizen of the City of Man. He is both a Filipino as well as a member of an international Church. As a Filipino, he imbibes the culture of his people and society, its weaknesses and its

strengths. The way Filipinos live, the meanings they put into their symbols and the values and models they uphold this ensemble shapes the character of the Bishop. We are the children of our culture. Its deficiencies are absorbed into our mores. Its strengths are imparted to us. Its influence penetrates our personality and shapes or distorts it.

### ***Filipino Culture's Influence***

Since he is inserted within two contexts the evangelical and the cultural it is vital that the Bishop integrates them in his person. There should be no rupture between his faith and culture. His being a Filipino should not clash with his being a Christian.

But what a daunting challenge Filipino culture presents. Its values increasingly hinder rather than facilitate human growth. It is a culture drowning in mediocrity and vulgarity. Our culture manipulates our imagination to develop an interest in shocking displays of bloody shoot-outs, in gossipy romance stories, in exclusive interviews with their idiotic conversations. Its authors are often in media and entertainment circles. More than this, ours is a culture where the poor continue to face a future of unrelenting poverty, where youth become drug addicts and jobless adults waste their lives away in drink and gamble. And the authors of this are primarily the rich and powerful who control our economic policies. And the church, is she also one of the architects of our culture? Assuredly so. When the newly installed parish priest arbitrarily abolishes the projects of his predecessor, he increases the sense of passivity and frustration which marks the culture of our laity. When a Bishop is more worldly than spiritual in his life style, when he is more concerned with building monu-

ments rather than communities of faith among the poor, then strengthens our culture of selfishness.

Yet, this was not always the culture that defined our national reputation. Once in our history, we could raise our heads proudly as a people renowned for their noble traits and civilized habits. Take the case of the *Katipunan* yes, the *Katipunan* and how the Christian formation of the First Evangelization which Filipinos received from missionaries influenced their culture of leadership.

Prof. Reynaldo Ileto's book: *Pasyon and Revolution* describes the concept of leadership and freedom which the *Katipunan* leaders had. These concepts were clothed in religious symbolisms. For the *Katipuneros*, the revolution they were planning was in essence a redemptive mission likened to the Passion of Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus suffered, died and rose again to save mankind from sin, so too must Filipinos suffer and die before they can rise from slavery to freedom. To win the *kalayaan* of the Motherland, the *Katipunan* demanded a high moral sacrifice. Its leaders and members were required to undergo internal purification *kalinisan ng kalooban*. This was the essential condition of participation in achieving their goal of liberation which they saw as a redemptive process. Jose Rizal caught its essential spirit which he stated as: *Redencion supone virtud; virtud sacrificio y sacrificio amor* redemption presupposes virtue; virtue sacrifice, and sacrifice love.

In our nation today, we have lost this precondition to leadership, the commitment to values born out of the integration of faith and life. Thus social, economic and political leadership in

our days is not based on virtue. Neither do sacrifice and love make their presence palpable among our leaders.

No wonder our culture is often derided as "flawed". No wonder that the most quoted sentences in the CBCP's 1997 Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics are these: "... Philippine Politics the way it is practiced has been most hurtful of us as a people. It is possibly the biggest bane in our life as a nation and the most pernicious obstacle to our achieving full development."

Let the words of Rizal be heard once more in every region of our land: *Redemption pre supposes virtue: virtue presupposes sacrifice and sacrifice presupposes love.* The virtue of truth and justice; the sacrifice for the common good; the love which sees others as brothers and sisters.

These and not political cleverness; these and not legalistic arguments; these and not aimed might and power makeup the formula for our nation's flight to new horizons of peace, prosperity and unity.

### *When Bishops Confront Politics*

But in spite of the emphatic *coveats* against bishops participating in direct and partisan political actions, we cannot totally ignore political engagement. To the French bishops, the late Pope John Paul II said: "By reason of your mission your call is to intervene regularly in public debate and the great questions of society." This then is the challenge and this then is the call to serve in a divided society such as ours today. It is not easy. But this is the call. In the Roman Missal we pray that a bishop may have a spirit of courage and right judgment, the spirit of knowledge and love so that he may build God's Church as a sign of salvation in the world. After all we have concluded that it is impossible to

truly love one's neighbor without engaging in politics. When we confront concrete cases of cruel injustice being inflicted on men and women, our commitment to love inevitably leads us to confrontations with those who control our politics. We immerse ourselves in pastoral visits where we witness the dehumanization caused by political corruption in our slums and neglected barangays. We inevitably find ourselves challenged by the injustices we see to take a stand on public issues. Our Christian love for the poor becomes politically by its own inner logic since to practice it requires mediation of politics.

But would this position not be against the admonition to Bishops not to engage in politics? But when we become involved in the defense of victims of injustice, we are in effect engaging not in the politics of Caesar but in the politics of the Gospel. Proof of this is that the principles that guide us in these situations are the counter-values of the Gospel. We choose love rather than hatred. We choose non-violence rather than armed conflict. We believe in what the world derides and rejects, namely, the power of forgiveness to bring about reconciliation among Filipinos.

We have contemporary examples of bishops deeply involved in issues that could be mistaken as political. Archbishop Cruz in jueteng; Archbishop Capalla in the coconut levy and Archbishop Aniceto and Bishop Cinense in the agrarian issue in Hacienda Luisita. All these bishops have been criticized as engaging in political matters. But I reject this accusation. Their involvement is that of facilitators who bring in the justice of the Father and the love of Christ and the peace of the Spirit and the reconciliation of the Church among contending parties. Their involvement is a logical extension of their evangelization which demands that they speak of a God *of and for* those who labor and are heavily burdened.

Bishops can no longer be accused of enjoying the irresponsible life of the disengaged.

People then see the difference between the motives of bishops and politicians. Bishops do not engage in politics with the mindset and values derived from political power plays. When Archbishop Cruz becomes deeply involved in a crusade against jueteng, he does not do so because it is a politically correct maneuver but because the demands of the Gospel to protect the poor from folly moves him. When Archbishop Capalla participates in meetings of farmers on the coconut levy issue, he does not do so because this will give him political influence but because the demands of the Gospel impel him to seek justice for the marginalized. When Archbishop Aniceto agrees to facilitate negotiations between the owners and the peasants of Hacienda Luisita, he does not do so to ingratiate himself with media and the elite, but because the demands of the Gospel of Jesus Christ press upon him to bring reconciliation and justice into this festering agrarian problem.

And because their motives differ from politicians, their language of discourse must also differ. Because their acts have the Gospel of Jesus Christ for their source and inspiration, then it follows that the language of Bishops should be marked by civility, charity, understanding, compassion and forgiveness. Their utterance do not demonize political opponent; their words do not close the door to reconciliation and conversion. The sarcastic phrase, the sharp retort, the ridicule of person - this is an idiom that must not be heard from the mouth and heart of bishops. From the depths of the Gospel there can only rise words that give peace and unity, sentiments that lead to compassion and understanding. This is the only form of rhetoric that fits the vocation and apostolate of bishops.



## *DOCUMENTATION*

# **Pastoral Letter of the Most Illustrious and Most Reverend Doctor Alfredo Verzosa to the Clergy of Nueva Segovia**

Translated by FR. SIMEON S. PERALTA<sup>1</sup>

### *Foreword to the Translation* *fErnesto A. Salgado, DD*

*The original Spanish version of this was published in the Boletin Ecclesiastico de Filipinas in 1926. Although the time of its writing is so distant from ours the discussion and themes are very relevant and a rich guide of the present-day cleric on his way to spiritual maturity.*

*Bishop Alfredo Verzosa (1877-1954) was the fourth Filipino Roman Catholic Bishop<sup>2</sup> and the first from the Northern Luzon Region. He belonged to the first wave of native bishops and in his*

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Simeon S. Peralta is a senior priest of the Archdiocese of Nueva Segovia.

<sup>2</sup> The first is the Bicolano Bishop Jorge Barlin (1850-1909) of the then Nueva Caceres Diocese who became a bishop in 1905, second was the Cebuano Bishop

own way, had exerted a lot of efforts in the development of Filipinism in the local Church. The bishop served as Ordinary of Lipa from 1917 to 1951. He was highly respected by his comrades as manifested in his being the most sought-after co-consecrator in the consecration of bishops during his time and the regular retreat companion chosen by then Apostolic Delegate to the Philippines, Archbishop William Piani. After the death of Archbishop Michael O'Doherty of Manila in 1949, Bishop Verzosa became the Dean<sup>3</sup> of the Philippine Hierarchy.

Documents and popular testimonies attest to the exceptional devoutness of this bishop. He was a great influence in the life of the Servant of God, Alfredo Ma. Obviar and the latter rendered him deep reverence and gratefulness. Bishop Verzosa held the holy man, Alfredo Obviar close to his heart as a son and protegee.

The pastoral letter below was addressed to the Clergy of Nueva Segovia<sup>4</sup> when Bishop Verzosa served as the Apostolic Administrator of his home-diocese. Obviously, it was composed as a Lenten spiritual meditation for priests for Lent (March 25, 1926). The canons and provisions cited in this document are those of the 1917 Code of Canon Law, Provincial Council of Manila

Juan Bautista Gorordo (1862-1934) of the then Diocese of Cebu in 1909, and the third was the Samar-native Bishop Pablo Siiigzon (1851-1923) of the Diocese of Calbayog in 1910. Bishop Verzosa was preconized on September 6, 1916 by Pope Benedict XV and was consecrated bishop on January 20, 1917.

<sup>3</sup> Which means being rendered with the honor as the most senior in episcopal consecration.

<sup>4</sup> Here, Nueva Segovia means the diocese covering the Ilocano speaking towns of Tarlac, the Civil Provinces of Pangasinan, La Union, Ilocos Sur, Abra, Ilocos Norte and the Cordilleras. At this time, Cagayan Valley and the Islands of Batanes and Babuyan were already a separate diocese.

*and the Second Synod of Nueva Segovia in 1914. These canons and provisions are not the ones in effect in our time but they serve as a reminder and exhortation for the practice of priestly witnessing.*

*May this profound work of this magnanimous bishop inspire and guide the clergy of today, especially in this tempestuous time of trials.*

## TEXT OF THE PASTORAL LETTER

We, Doctor Alfredo Verzosa, by the Grace of God and of the Holy Apostolic See, Bishop of Lipa and Apostolic Administrator of Nueva Segovia.

To the Reverend Clergy of Nueva Segovia, Greetings:

Upon our assumption to the sacred office of Apostolic Administrator of Nueva Segovia to which the Roman Pontiff has appointed us, we gather together all the cares, thoughts and affections of the heart with you, beloved priests, with whom we are united with bonds of brotherhood for a multitude of reasons. The first fruits of Divine Mercy received in this diocese, impose on us the duty of loving her (Divine Mercy) with filial tenderness and, aware of our weakness, the responsibility of a new pastoral duty whose weight Divine Providence sweetly imposes but elevates and fortifies with the action of supernatural grace which itself inspires the natural.

As a disciple of that Divine Teacher Who is charity Himself, we like to start this with a greeting not of words but of the heart, making as our own, with humility and respect, the most beautiful

sighs of the priestly prayer of Jesus Christ for his Apostles: "Holy Father, keep them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me that they may be one through charity. I have given them Thy doctrine and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth (John 17: 11. 17).

Certainly, no other thing distinguishes our names of PRIEST, but that of gentlemen separated from the world, chosen with the most sublime vocation, to be sanctified in the truth. Outstanding circumstances surround the start of our office in this diocese and all of them invite us to obey with that charge of the Apostle to his disciple Timothy: *For this reason I remind you to keep alive the gift that God gave you when I laid my hands on you* (2 Tim 1: 6). The recent exaltation on the altars of St. John Baptist Vianney,<sup>5</sup> Parish Priest of Ars, and the sacred season of Lent in which we find ourselves, are very providential occasions during which, each one of us enters into himself and reflects on how he can comply with those sacred obligations assumed through the sacramental imposition of the hands of the bishop.

Contemplating the wondrous garden of virtues of such outstanding parish priests and on recollecting ourselves in the solitude appropriate for Lent, we bring together the teachings that we can propose, from the schools of sanctity too numerous and impressible to enumerate, much more to explain according to their importance and necessity. Nevertheless, there is one virtue, which as a healthy root endows the life of a priest, with the abundance of ripe seasoned fruits, which, of his zeal, the Church grows in hope. That virtue is PRIESTLY PIETY.

<sup>5</sup> St. John Mary Vianney was canonized by Pope Pius XI in 1925, a time very recent to the writing of this pastoral letter.

This is the first quality that in every ecclesiastic should shine in its splendor. What is sacerdotal piety? Which are the means to acquire and augment it? What are the gravest reasons that oblige us to keep on persevering in this labor of our own sanctification? Here are the three parts or chapters, which we propose for our consideration, placing before our eyes the beautiful examples of St. John Baptist Vianney, perfect model for priests.

### */ . The Pious Priest*

PIETY is one virtue that arouses a man to give to God the worship of love and the sacrifice that He deserves. If the virtue of RELIGION admires God as Creator and Lord, PIETY considers Him as a Father. If devotion is the perfection of charity that gives to God the worship of Love with promptness, PIETY is the perfumed wreath or bouquet of the religious practices with which we serve God, Our Father, with love and diligence.

This wreath of flowers alone can offer true sanctity. False piety by itself alone is a veil of vanity or hypocrisy, when added to it, is the desire to deceive. Thus, the service that the Lord demands from the priest, the Lord expressed well when on sending his apostles to the world on mission he said: "*As the Father sent me, so I send you*" (John 20:21). This is to say that our office is to continue the exalted work of the Redeemer, the same that he would do if he would continue living in visible form among us: to teach and sanctify men. It is good you say, beloved priests, that the teaching of the celestial and divine things and the administration of the sacraments demand from the priest

that sanctity together with all the harmoniously joined apostolic virtues.

The statement of St. Charles Borromeo to his priests deserves to be meditated upon: If we have one mind, brothers, how sublime are the things God has entrusted into our hands!!! How strong this thought is to excite us to live a life worthy of the priest. What has not the Lord placed in my hands, which he has placed in the hands of His very own Son only begotten, co-eternal, and co-substantial with Himself? In my hands, he has placed his treasures, the sacraments, the grace, He has placed the souls, for Him the most precious, whom He has loved more than Himself, whom he has bought with his own blood; in my hands, he has placed Heaven itself, which He can open, and close to the others.

The Holy Parish Priest of Ars, destined by Divine Providence to teach the ecclesiastics of these days, the road of true priestly spirit, appears to our eyes from the moment of his ordination to the subdiaconate, (verified the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of July, 1814) to have been brought to the altars of the Cathedral of Grenoble, in France, not for his literary triumphs, but more, for the the edifying example of his piety.

Here, also is the question of the diocesan Authority, once the sufficient worthiness of the candidate has been verified: "Is the youth Vianney pious? Does he possess devotion to the most Holy Virgin?" "Is he a model of piety?" The directors of the seminary unanimously answered: "Yes."

"Well then" replied the Authority, "I accept him; Divine Grace will do the rest."

"As soon as John B. Vianney was ordained priest," the present Pope, Pius XI says in the Bull of his canonization, of 31 st of May, 1925, "such was the fire of zeal of his charity that the men who were more prudent, predicted with reason that he was to realize works very outstanding for the divine glory and the salvation of souls."

In effect, who would not admire this model of priests, who to his very active life dared to join the constancy of his pious practices? He governed the parish of Ars for 40 years, founded the Asylum of Providence, but above all, it was his particular vocation to hear confessions. God endowed him with extraordinary discernment of spirits, the gift of counsel, and the power to perform and work miracles. His confessional box was an object of one numerous and continuous pilgrimage, that came from foreign countries, not only of France, but also of Saboya, Belgium, England, Germany and other nations. Sixteen hours of each day was the ordinary time which he employed during his parochial life's most enduring labor it can be called super human. Thus, as he worked for the good of souls, he did not forget his life. He sanctified himself so that he could sanctify others better. He did not forget the "pause" for prayer with which the Divine Master admonished His disciples, having acquired the habits of those apostolic men, who shine from God when they ought to occupy themselves with the activities of a certain ministry, and return to God when they can do so. He complied with the necessity to pray through those continuous aspirations or spontaneous elevations of the soul that reach God as rays of light to their focus, as so called to heaven. He consecrated the time considerably to the reading of the lives of the saints, which were his favorite spiritual reading and to visit the Blessed Sacrament. These were rapid visits,

done lightly; he could lay prostrate for long hours, at the feet of the Lord before the Tabernacle. Work was for him not a thing other than a continuation of prayer. While working he spoke with God or of God; he loved Him and led others to love Him.

*//. Means for Acquiring and Increasing Priestly Piety*

Let us concentrate here all our attention, beloved priests, and with serious minds, let us follow the voice and the ways of our Divine King, Jesus Christ. Let us be logical and orderly. He who wants an end or goal has to use the means necessary to obtain it, and he who pursues the more excellent aims, has to employ also those means more excellent that God has placed in his hands. Priestly piety is so necessary, so beautiful, so divine, and so admired even in men who will not be priests, who have not totally lost the concept of its dignity, who do not desire it for themselves. Such desire is easy and common to all. But what needs effort and requires the total energy of the spirit, is the resolve to use the NECESSARY MEANS to obtain the precious virtue of priestly piety.

Let us examine the defects which frequently destroy our better resolves, conceived in the seminary, in the confessions or in the time of Spiritual Exercises and let us form the firm resolution, accompanied by humble prayers, to implement immediately the means of sanctification which we now record and keep in mind.

1. FREQUENT CONFESSION: Because he celebrates the Mass and Sacraments daily, the priest who abandons frequent confession exposes himself to commit and multiply the grave sacrileges, with their fatal consequences of spiritual dryness and hardness of heart, symptoms of final perdition. Take note of what



the Doctors teach. Says St. Alfonso de Ligorio, "that a sacrilegious priest celebrating commits in one case, four mortal sins because:

1. He celebrates in sin
2. He receives communion in sin
3. He administers a sacrament in sin
4. He administers the sacrament to one who is unworthy, as he himself is unworthy, being in sin. One who neglects frequent confession can be on the first road that leads to such a horrible abyss.

Apart from this extreme evil, we wish to make the following observation of the famous Abbot Dubois in his treatise on the SAINTLY PRIEST. The plentitude of the good fruits of one good confession does not last much more than three or four days. At the end of this short period, grave faults are not committed but commonly, what is felt is a lessening of fervor, less attention in prayer, less care to the words, and less mortification of the senses. The multitude of infidelities are committed faster which are impossible on the day of confession; and this little abandonment of confession increases until a new confession comes to restore to the soul, its lost energy. When this new confession is delayed for some time, the evil becomes greater, the delicateness of conscience is altered, bad habits may start and the perfection does not return anymore. Therefore, very frequent confession is necessary if we want sincerely to be among the saintly priests.

2. MENTAL AND VOCAL PRAYERS. Our Most Holy Father, Pius X, of happy memory on celebrating his 50 years in the priesthood directed a very touching exhortation to the clergy of the whole world, with the purpose of renewing in the Clergy,

the spirit of sacerdotal piety. What he said on this most important means of sanctification is expressed most clearly in this way:

"Daily meditation: its advantages - The principal point is that a determined time is designated for each day, for the meditation on things eternal. There is no priest who can disregard this without a note of grave negligence and detriment to his soul. Writing to Eugene III, his disciple and later the Roman Pontiff, the most holy Abbot Bernard lovingly and freely advised him, that he should not fail not for one day, in the meditation of Divine things, without admitting any kind of excuse done to the occupation of the day, so numerous and important as the supreme apostolate brings with it. For this reason it seems necessary to enumerate, with great wisdom the usefulness of this exercise: (It purifies its origin.) *Meditation purifies its origin, that is, the mind from which it proceeds. It regulates also the affections, directs the acts, corrects the excuses, arranges the customs, and makes one's life honorable and well ordered; in the end, it intensifies equally the science of the Divine things and the human things. It clarifies what is confused, closes what is open, gathers what has been scattered, scrutinizes what is hidden, investigates the truth, looks carefully at the images, and explores what is imagined and apparent. It disposes what ought to be done, and goes over what is already done in a manner that nothing remains in the soul not corrected or that which needs to be corrected. What prospers presently, the opposite of evil that is not felt is fortitude; the other is prudence.* (DE CONSIDER., C. I. c. 7). The summary of these great advantages, which meditation of it brings about, teaches us, and at the same time, it informs us, as it is, that it is not only fruitful for all, but also necessary for all.

Let us consider Death, beloved priests, a sincere teacher of life, which will teach us when there will be no more remedy, when we have lived, deceived, and cared not for the practice of prayer. Thus, for whose services and love do we work and devotedly perform our priestly office? Is it for our own honor or good? We would be the most despised among all men. After the very least temporal gain which we can expect from the world, and which goes far beyond compensating such great fatigue, and below the same things, only to hear at the end of our journey, that sad judgement of the Lord; *"Amen, I say to you, they already received their reward, truly I tell you; You already received your reward."* Therefore, if we seek the service of God, let us serve Him according to his will, that which in repeated ways he manifested to his apostles, carrying them to solitude that they may pray and rest from their concerns of preaching and caring for others. Listen as the Pope Pius X himself continues his reasoning full of fatherly affection, in the manner:

"Prayer in the active life of the priest. - Even if the different priestly functions are holy and in a graceful manner, are respectable, nevertheless according to custom, those who comply do not consider them with the reverence that they deserve. From here, lessening the fervor little by little easily leads up to negligence and finally, to distaste of things holy. Added to this is what is necessary for a priest to live daily IN THE MIDST OF DEPRAVED GENERATIONS, such that many times in the practice of charity he should fear that the wiles of the infernal serpent might entangle him. What do we say of how easy it is for the souls, although pious or saintly, to be stained with the dust of the world? Look, how great is the necessity of going back to those

days for the contemplation of the things of heaven, for the purpose of recovering, time after time, the strength of mind and will against those temptations."

"Besides, it is proper for the priest to acquire certain ease in elevating oneself to heavenly things and in them acquire that taste or joy in the things of God, to teach them, and counsel with their adjustments; and in such a manner, that he placed fix his life over material things, which he should do according to his office, and it according to God, guided and moved by faith. Now, this kind of disposition of the soul, that spontaneous version of the soul with God is produced, conserved, sustained principally with the help of the daily meditation, a thing that is very clear to him, who thinks a little, that it is not necessary to dwell on it to explain it. The confirmation of this is sadly impressed in the life of those priests, who, either consider the meditation of the eternal truths lightly or look at them with annoyance. You will see these men in whom has languished the most important good of *feeling in Christ*, given completely to earthly things, pretending vain things, speaking useless words and treating those holy things, negligently, coldly and, perhaps, unworthily. In principle, those priests soaked in the grace of their recent priestly anointing, had prepared their spirits with care to pray the office so that they would not be like those who tempt God. They sought the most conducive time; and those places most free of the noise of people; they strove to investigate the meanings of the word of God; they sang praises, they wailed or groaned, they rejoiced, they spilled over their spirits with the psalmist. But now, how changed they are. Already, hardly anything remains in them of that happy piety with which they yearned for the Divine mysteries. How loving were they at other times for

those tabernacles. Their souls longed to sit at the table of the Lord and to bring others to the same. Before the sacrifice, what purity of prayers were they of that soul so filled with fervor? In the celebration of the Mass, how much reverence was there then, how beautifully were solemn ceremonies performed in their entire splendor! How many graces were given from the depths of the heart? So happily, before the people, the wondrous color of Christ spread itself. You recall, we pray you most beloved sons... *recall ... those past days (Hebrews 10:32 - Remember how it was with you in the past. In those days after God's light had shone on you, you suffered many things, yet were not defeated by the struggle)* then, in effect, the soul was on fire, nourished with the care of the holy meditation until here," spoke the Holy Father.

As regards to the vocal prayer, you know well, my beloved priests that he who prays with more attention and head start, the more so if we give ourselves to mental prayer. Of little spiritual benefits, the recitation of the Divine Office is when the soul is not accustomed to be recollected and to be united with God through means of meditation.

At this point we desire to recommend to you that saying of the ascetics; less devotions and more devotedness. Let us place our care first, on the reciting, *worthily, attentively and devoutly*, with the correct pronunciation, the Divine Office and the form of the sacrament, and all the prayers of the Liturgy, whose meaning we ought to study and review. In the second place, we insistently advise you that all public prayer, which is done in the church in any dialect, should be well prepared as the holiness of the place demands. The prayer needs to be approved first by the ordinary, and furthermore, the Litanies should be approved by the Holy

See, according to the decrees of the Canon Law in its can. 1259 (1917 CIC). These should be prayers recited with clarity, pause and devotion, the best way it can be done, not to be prolonged with boring generalities of the place and recommended to the attention and personal preparation of the Parish Priest.

As to the vocal prayers of the private devotion of the priest, the advice of the superior or spiritual director should be sought to examine which promote piety and which the state of his soul requires and the usual activities allow.

3. SPIRITUAL READING: This is one fountain of holiness to which each day we can easily turn to. The difficulty of one's own speech and concentration of the mind, which in meditation distract us, makes the reading of a book, in whose pages are declared the concepts, ought to enlighten our way; the resolution that should form our conduct are deduced; and the various affections that ought to enflame our hearts to the service and love of God are proposed. What excuse is left for us to neglect this means of promoting the piety of our spirit? Understanding priestly perfection, it would be feigned not to own ignorance a religious book which offers us such strong appeal.

Let us say to ourselves with sincerity, although with shame, that *hunger and thirst for holiness and justice*, exalted, praised by the Savior to which he promised. The complete abundance or the peace of the heart give us a heart desirous of those degrees of sweetness of the priestly piety and he will know how to find them in the midst of involvement in the daily activities, a corner in the house or in the choir or at the foot of the altar twenty minutes for spiritual reading. The personal experience of the zealous priest

has made him relish this exercise, the most inspired consolations of a living faith, of a humble contrition, the ardent sentiments of charity, and perhaps with more frequency, in the meditation itself. God, who alone desires to expand himself lovingly in the faithful soul, speaks to his beloved ministers, underneath the letters the floating affections that touch him as far as it makes him cry. You see him in that happy moment, kissing reverently that page of the book; humbling himself in a quiet meditation, passing those celestial lines again and raising himself up from the reading to comply with his parish duties with new determination. Such precious fruit is assured, beloved priests, with the needed preparation and practice of spiritual reading. We may know how to select the book with the purpose that claims to attempt to augment in ourselves, priestly piety. The didactic treatises that may be of dogma, morality or philosophy serve to prepare sermons or to direct souls, but not for the nourishment of one's own devotion. There are works whose brilliance of style or unusual narration nourishes the imagination, but not the heart. None of these books ought to serve us for spiritual reading. Let us read the book with solid doctrine whose spirit inflames our hearts with the love of God, detachment from all that alienates us from Him and the fondness for the perfect virtues proper to our situation.

These should occupy the first places among these works; the Gospels, the moral books of Sacred Scriptures, and the selected books of the saintly fathers. But as much as their statements can be found with greater ease and are designed in the most illustrious asceticism of the Catholic Church, to these we go more frequently; as for example, the *Imitation of Christ* by the Venerable Kempis, the pious works of St. Alphonse M. de Liguori, the *Guide for Sinners* by P. Granada, the *Exercises of Perfection and Christian*

virtues of P. Rodriguez, the Holy Priest of Abbot Dubois, etc. When we already have the book in hand we are to use, some moments of recollections on the divine presence precede the reading of it; afterwards, let us read with pauses and reflections, with a living desire for our own perfection considering as distraction, any thoughts of accumulating advice for others. The masters of spirituality recommend the suspension of reading for some moments when we feel some impulse of doing so, taking advantage of the abundance of illustrations and affections which heaven wants them to communicate with us, as no one can expect the unexpected flow of grace but it forewarns and provokes with attentive concentration and humble prayers. This exercise should not be stopped without considering, generally, the matter and some practical resolution, which the fruit of the reading compels into action.

If we are constantly immersed in this exercise, how is it possible that a saintly life is not elevated to higher levels? Oh! If in him who would use half of the time in frivolous conversations, the curiosities of newspapers or perhaps in recreations unworthy of the sacerdotal character! Without doubt, the parish duties will be complied with greater perfection, discouragement will not overpower the Spirit; on the contrary, God's blessings will give new vigor or strengths in his service.

4. DEVOTION TO THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT AND THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS. How amazing and sweet is the relationship the Most Holy Sacrament of Jesus reveals between Jesus Christ present in reality and his minister, the priest! What intimate obligation has the parish priest to serve and love



Jesus in the sacrament, whom he himself brought down to the altar of His Church. He distributes to the faithful, carries to the sick, keeps safe in the tabernacle, guards the keys of the loving prison and he alone disposes Jesus- Host for the sanctification of souls. Can a priest be thought of as alienated from the effects of the Eucharist, when we see him so intimately united with Him because of his office? (Or duty)

Oh! What love and predilection guards the priest, the sweetest heart of Jesus, who has chosen him from the world, educated him in the seminary and from then on admitted him as his companion, living with him under the same roof because of his Eucharistic presence! In return the faithful priest lives solely for Jesus in the sacrament, wholly and perpetually consecrated to his love and services. Those blessings, impositions of the hands and sacred anointing which are used in the sacrament of Ordination, produce a double effect in the new priest. They make him a sacred person consecrated to the Eucharist. This double quality, my most beloved priests, is that which places us in one Sacramental Lord and it should awaken in us the most affectionate caresses of adoration and gratitude to the Most Holy Host.

The priest has received from the Church a *Constitutive blessing*, which in contrast to the invocative, constitutes him to be permanently sacred. Besides, the chalice and paten, wine and host, the ornaments and other utensils of Sacred sacrifice, which were in his ordination and the prayers manifest clearly, that the priest dedicates himself to the service of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Of all these ideas we should deduce that, as the vases of gold and silver once they consecrated them cannot be used for profane

things without sacrilege, analogically, the thought, the desire, and the love of the priest cannot, without profaning them, wander or roam around, far from the sanctuary, but the habitual center of activity has to be Jesus Himself in the Holy Sacrament and the company of his divine glory. So therefore, as the consecrated Host, as long as the appearance of bread remains, another Being is that which constitutes itself as propitiatory victim; in a similar way, the priest preserving his own looks, the same voice, the same body and the same will has been transformed, nevertheless, victim of love which, with all its being, adores Jesus in the sacrament, gives him graces at every moment, implores for all the needs of the people, atones for all the faults of all men with his continuous works.

Many priests know the theory of the union of the soul with God, but how far are they who know it in practice, even among those most pious. It is a divine science, which can be learned more quickly in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist. His love for man, but above all, His love for the priest, His chosen minister, appears there with the profundity and width of an abyss without base or bottom, the abyss of His most sweet Heart. Let us take refuge, most beloved priests, in the Heart of Jesus. Let us gather together our whole being, within this oven of Charity; above all when we have it in our hands, when so closely they rest on our sight and in our breast. This union is not interrupted for a long time in the midst of the worries of the day. Separating ourselves from sensible things and the human impressions let us go down with frequency to the base of our souls because this we hope as in a temple of God, is our Lord, there He loves us with all the affections of our heart and with attention of our thoughts to unite

us with Him, to speak to us to tell us that He will never abandon us, to console us in our afflictions and to bless our fatigue for the salvation of souls. With pious ejaculations to the Heart of Jesus and visits to the Blessed Sacrament let us practice this union with God and it will be the beginning of a life much more holy and fruitful.

5. DEVOTION TO THE BLESSED VIRGIN. In this precious life of union with God is hidden the secret of the Most Holy Virgin and we ought to approach her, sure that she, will reach out for her priests. Oh! What love and care for priests does she have! She, whose first preoccupation on this earth, after the Ascension of Jesus to the heavens was to help and protect with her maternal affection, the Apostles and Disciples of the Lord. Let us make efforts to feel a tender and filial devotion to Mary Immaculate; let us study her exalted privileges in the dogma and in the history. Always let us make gifts with attention in her honor, of her let us recall in the confessional, in the pulpit, when her feasts come closer, visiting the sick, distributing alms and in every conversation.

Mary is my mother! Holy thought that ought to rule over all the hours of the day, from the offering of all the works of the morning up to examination of conscience of the night. Holy thought that ought to illumine our doubts and to give us strength in dangers of temptation; that ought to stimulate us to work without pause in the sanctification of many souls, extending from where our indefatigable zeal reaches the fruit of the Redemption that the most Holy Virgin brought to the world.

6. STUDY OF ECCLESIASTICAL MATTERS AND CONSCIENTIOUS PERFORMANCE OF PRIESTLY DUTIES AND OFFICES. - As a field that is not worked on remains fallow, is filled with useless underbrush, and produces nothing, so also is the intellect of a priest who abandons study, turns sterile for the works of his sacred duties. The confessional, the pulpit and the consultation, which every moment demand from the parish priest many hours of study for the needed execution of his very delicate profession. If to any medical man (physician), lawyer or engineer, the remote preparation from his university studies is not enough, but rather the public require with reason an attentive study of each case entrusted to him, and according to the gravity of its consequences, why should a parish priest be exempted from studying diligently the solution of the problem of the parish, of the questions presented to him, and the matter and forms of his predicaments? Being affairs of conscience of a character transcending those of other professions, so much so that its spiritual nature demands the sacrifice of all materials that may be contrary, however expensive it may be and embracing the teachings of the highest mysteries of the Catholic religion, more complex questions, truly obscure difficulties and nevertheless so spread in whatever newspaper or perverse sheet of propaganda, who has not learned, even from personal experience, the necessity of continuous study to carry out fruitfully the office of teacher, judge, father of the souls entrusted to his responsibility.

Dearest priests, for the glory of Jesus Christ, and the Catholic Church, for the love of so many souls whose happy eternity or pitiful eternity, can depend on us, even for the honor, if you wish, of the Filipino clergy, I entreat that you may have a delicate

professional conscience. It can be that on some days or weeks that the whole of external activities may not consume all your time; but you seek your rest not in the company of men, nor in unnecessary visits or superfluous travels, but frequently in the solitude of the office and in the consideration of multiple and grave affairs, domestic and public, of your parish.

Only as such shall we accustom ourselves to reflect on our duties, to examine our resolutions within and outside the penitential tribunal, to give life to the confraternities, congregations and schools that languish because of the lack of constant force and directions; to watch over and augment the propriety of the Church, and the worship functions; to take hold of the means of defense against the avalanche of public immorality and the anti-Catholic propaganda; in one word, the study and prayer will teach as the conscientious accomplishment of our duties and priestly offices.

7. EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE - We have gone through, almost without extending the occupation (worries of the day) of the whole day and the whole parochial life, but we ought not give ourselves the sleep of the night without having a short review of what we did during the day that passed. Ten minutes, in which no more time can be at our disposal, is enough for this exercise, which is very necessary to obtain priestly piety. All the failures and negligence of the day, here are they repaired, as one examines himself and sincerely repents for them.

In the examinations an accounting is made of the voluntary defects of prayers of the Mass, of the Divine Office, the administration of the sacraments, the imprudent words, and even the twisted intentions in the holier works. To fall in a part of human

weakness, but to examine oneself to repent and to detest faults daily is little by little, proper only to the manly and constant attitude.

We will have failures up to death, but they are not the sign of our defeat as long as while we have such we keep on fighting them, and erase them through our examination of conscience and repent for them. The sign worth fearing is the abandonment of the examination of conscience, for it signifies that peace with those faults have been made, and the surrender to the enemy.

The pages of the enchanted life of the saintly Parish Priest of Ars are a very rich arsenal of practices intended for acquiring the precious virtue of priestly piety. One day the saintly parish priest with so much pain spoke so profoundly as inexplicably of the difficulty of the priest to correspond to the sanctity of his vocation. His interpellator told him; "Honorable Parish Priest, in spite of that difficulty, there are in the clergy very worthy persons." "What do you say, my friend?" the servant of God answered. "It is sure that in the clergy there are persons very worthy. And where can we find them, O my God, if they were not here? More (he continued saying with increasing emphasis) to offer the Mass is to say to be a seraphim..." And he started to cry without power to stop himself; after a moment of silence, he added, "Ah, my friend, if we would only know what the Mass is, we would die only in heaven; we will be able to comprehend the joy that exists in saying the Mass. Ah, O my God, worthy of compassion is the priest who celebrates the mass as an ordinary thing..." Here, the tears returned to make him express the betrayal and exclaimed: "O my God, how miserable is the priest who is not interiorly disposed... Better for him is needed, silence, tranquility, retreat; yes my friend, retreat because God speaks only in solitude. Sometimes I said to Mons.

Devie: 'If you want to convert your diocese it is important that you make all your parish priests saints.' "

The admirable devotion of the Parish Priest of Ars to the Blessed Sacrament was evident in the profound concentration with which he read the Divine Office kneeling and without any support before the tabernacle. Frequently he made pauses, and looked with admiration to where Jesus was, with joy so ineffable as if he appeared to see Jesus our Lord. On a certain day one of his companions, surprised him in that attitude; he was disturbed and said: "I believe that the time will come when the Parish Priest of Ars will live alone of the Eucharist."

The heart of the Most Holy Virgin was the refuge of the saintly parish priest in all his sorrows and the arsenal that provided him with all the arms necessary to combat hell. His great practice was a Novena to the Most Pure Heart of Mary. "So many times I had recourse to," he said, "that spring, which would take much time to day up, if ever it were not inexhaustible."

He would not exempt any means to promote devotion to Mary. Before the start of the pilgrimage of penitents to Ars, its principal feasts were already celebrated with much solemnity and great crowds of people. This religious revival, fruit of the example of the saintly parish priest, was always growing. There have never been more strangers in Ars than in those days consecrated to the devotion of the Mother of God.

For a long time he had the habit of writing his homilies for the Sunday, and he has confessed that the work was most painful to him; it was one of the most difficult mortification of his life. He composed them without lifting his hands and to the effect that he

passed whole nights enclosed in the sacristy. He was convinced that the priest, to be an apostolic man, ought to prepare, with the sweat of his brow, the bread of the Word and the merit of his efforts to attract the blessings of God on this ministry. And in the time in which he could, the saintly parish priest assisted in the periodical reunions of the clergy of the district, which they started to establish under the name of Conferences. He had imposed on himself the law of never missing them at all; but at the end of the conference, he excused himself discreetly and would not appear at the meal. When the turn of the parish of Ars came, and to him fell the responsibility of receiving his companions, the meal was prepared in the honorable castle of a pious lady whom he had convinced to shower gifts on the priests.

Our Sovereign Pontiff Pius XI on writing the panegyrics on the saintly Parish Priest of Ars in the Bull of his canonization wanted to close it with this exhortation. In a very special manner the priests who discharge the parochial office, should imitate St. John Baptist M. Vianney. They have in the new saint a brilliant model of Pastor of souls, full of piety and zeal, which he put into practice in his parish duty with admirable diligence, prudence and charity.

### *///. Motives for growing in the priestly piety<sup>6</sup>*

The intrinsic reasons that should serve to encourage us to promote each day more and more in our spirit a solid priestly

<sup>6</sup> The canons and provisions presented in this work are not the ones in effect in our time but they are a rich reminder and exhortation in the practice of priestly witnessing.



piety have already to a great extent been mentioned in the preceding lines. We still have graver extrinsic reasons which in no way are licit for us to forget, now those that the Code constitutes the obligations of our sacred office. The general laws of Ecclesiastical Right, the prescription of the Provincial Council of Manila and the decrees of the Second Synod of Nueva Segovia clearly determine the practical rules of this diocese, and whose summary we want to propose here as a matter for our examination of conscience, especially when we prepare ourselves for confession.

Ecclesial Code: 124: Clerics, because of their vocation, ought to be different from the lay people through their interior life and more holy external life and should be for them, models with these virtues and good works.

C. 125. The Ordinaries should manage that the clerics:

1. Should confess **WITH FREQUENCY**.

2. **EACH DAY** they should dedicate some time for mental prayer; visit the Blessed Sacrament, recite the rosary and examine their conscience.

C. 810. The priest should not omit preparing himself with pious prayers for the offering of the Sacred Sacrifice and afterwards, to give thanks to God for such a great gift.

C. 128. The secular priest ought to have spiritual exercises, at least every three years, without which no one should be exempted, unless for a just reason, and an expressed permission of the Ordinary. The Ordinary will have to determine the length of time and the religious house in which the exercises are made.

C. 129. Clerics should not abandon their studies specially the sacred studies, having received the priesthood, should continue in the sacred discipline, that solid doctrine taught by the greater ones and commonly accepted by the Church, avoiding the new novelties in words and in false science.

C. 133. It is prohibited to clerics to cohabitare with persons of the other sex that could appear suspicious, and also to visit them. They can cohabit with those women only whose relationship prevents suspicions, like their mother, sister... (Consult the Manila Council)

C. 138. To all the Clerics anything that is unworthy of the clerical state is forbidden, as taking part in indecent arts, *the games where money is involved, carry arms*, except in cases of special danger; to engage in the house, more so if it is noisy, *enter bars, cafe's* or other similar establishments, unless in cases of necessity and just cases approved by the Ordinary of the place.

C. 140. They cannot be present at presentations, dances or other diversions unworthy of their state or *cause scandal those attended by clerics, especially in public theatres*.

C. 142. *To engage in business or negotiation by themselves or other, for themselves or for others.*

*Provincial Council of Manila*, n. 806: Certainly those who have dedicated themselves to the clerical life must shine not only in the excellence in piety, this we exhort them, that faithful to their vocation, they should practice daily mental prayer, at least for half an hour. Besides, we wish that they approach frequently the spiritual tribunal (confession) so that they can always preserve themselves clean from either mortal sins or venial sins, and decide

that they purify themselves from earthly affections. Because the sanctity of the office and the purity of the Eucharistic sacrifice greatly demand this. Thus, we recommend in the Lord to all the priests of our dioceses that in the bigger towns they confess each week, and where they cannot do it easily, at least every two weeks.

They should celebrate the Divine Sacrifice, all the days, not for gain of stipends but with the desire to receive the Eucharistic Bread; they should glow in a special affection of piety with the Blessed Sacrament, to which One Lord Jesus Christ has loved us, they should force themselves of such a manner in tasting the sweetness of His heart, inflame themselves with His love which in themselves, represent his image and likeness; that they place themselves under the tutelage of the Virgin Mother of God, who is the Mother of beautiful love specially for the Clergy; they should not cease asking her help, they should always have in their hearts and tongues her sweet and powerful name. They should work in words and example in infiltrating the souls of all with the devotion of the Most Holy Mother of God.

807. As good soldiers of Christ, they should dedicate themselves in the house to study and prayer. They should be humble in bearing wherever they may be after the example of Christ, sincere and right in their relationship, amiable with the people, not anxious of vainglory, not excited by impulses of arrogance, positions to which they were not called to dominate but to work, according to the saying of the Saviour: The greatest among you should behave as the least.

*The Second Synod of the Diocese of Nueva Segovia* outlines the Norms of Life of the Priests and speaking on the office of the Parish Priest lays down the following decrees:

N: 51. The Vicar Forane is in charge of remitting to the Curia the certificates of worthy confession of the priest of the Vicariate,

52. He encourages all the priests to mental prayer daily at least for 15 minutes.

53. All should wear the clerical garb, inside and outside, although they can wear white. Never shall there be a pretest of travelling to avoid this obligation.

54. It is prohibited for all priests of the diocese to:

- a) engage directly or indirectly profane business;
- b) affiliate one's self to a political party;
- c) be a candidate for a civil office;
- d) be an executor even if the testator is a priest;
- e) all games of chance, with greater strictness in cockfights;
- f) permit games in the parish house;
- g) the same as those forbidden by the Council of Manila.

The good example of the Parish Priest is the more eloquent and persuasive preaching, without which everything is less than useless.

Let us meditate on these laws, my dearest priests. Let us engrave them in the heart because they contain the spirit of priestly piety, the spirit of our vocation, Priestly Vocation. Blessed is the star that, lifting us up from the darkness of the world, has enthroned us to the highest dignity on earth, resplendent apparition that has seized us from earthly affections and transferred us to the sacred premises of the seminary. He who loves sacerdotal piety prescribed in these laws is he who loves Holy Vocation!

But how shall we love these laws if we forget them, if we do not express them in our daily life? The laws are mute letters and inert; they only live when they are observed. We all lament the relaxation of customs in the individuals and in the families. We are all alarmed before the advance of error and the enemies of the Catholic Church. Perhaps, who finds reading this pastoral letter directed entirely to the priests is surprised of our having omitted the instructions we owe to the whole people as much as its general necessity is great. But as soon as you have failed in your account of what the people will be ordinarily how will the priest be? Thus if, we all reform in the performance of our duties and in one private conduct, the people entrusted to our governance will also participate in spiritual reform, and the image of Jesus will shine with the sanctity of life in those places and in the public customs. *Take heed to yourself*, the apostle tells his disciple Saint Timothy - *and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you save both yourself and your hearers.*

Go over the view and the consideration, once in a while over these pages, that summarizes the doctrine of priestly piety, take heed to yourselves, beloved co-workers, in the first place, because one cannot be good to others who is not good to himself. Says Ecclesiastes (14:5), *"Who can be evil to himself and good to others?"* Conserve with fervent prayers those holy desires to follow the sacred decrees. *Hold on to them.* Only with these can we obtain the double purpose of our vocation: *And you will save both yourself and those who hear you.*

Let us keep before our eyes the eternal principle that we ought to support and base our undertaking on one alone, Jesus Christ. To dispense with Him is to renounce the salvation of the people. We have to preach Jesus; we have to enthrone Jesus in the hearts

of the faithful. We have to lead the children, the youth, the father of the families, the rich, the poor, the teachers and government officials to Jesus Christ. *Pro Christo legatione fungimur* (To Christ we have to guide the pilgrims).

But that this legation is effective and fruitful, we used to practice its sublime attraction over our neighbors as instruments that transmit a divine force. Solely the saintly priests, imbued with genuine piety, have been all the time the most effective agents of transformation and social development. As the practice of piety was neglected, they surrendered themselves to external dissipation, which turned them sterile for the apostolate. To this concern for one's own use that requires solitude, and the defeat of one's own self, refers to the old saying of the philosopher who said; "As often as I was with men I became less a man." It is an admirable and opportune lesson to us ecclesiastics that in the midst of the world that we have to Christianize we run the risk, if we are not very saintly, of losing our supernatural power. We can also repent: "The more often I was with the lay people, I returned to be less ecclesiastic."

Such loss of spirit does not follow those priests assiduous in meditation and recollection. Those who do not lose the efficacy of the actions on secular things, on people in the familiarity with them, but in discreet and selfless charity knows how to save oneself with sobriety for those necessary cases never without failing in those that demand sacrifice and mortification. In these was an amiable model, the saintly parish priest of Ars. In the midst of those continuous confessions and catechisms that occupied him for more than 30 years without interruption, morning and afternoon, he did not dispense himself from his prayers during the

silence of midnight driving his prolonged visits to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament.

There at the foot of the tabernacle, my beloved co-workers, he hides himself, the secret of the priest-apostle who has conquered souls. The struggle should not intimidate us with fear that all the enemies can prevail against us if we unite in faith and in the devotion surrounding tightly in a beam, the sacred tabernacle. Before this august sacrament of union, whose species are formed from many grains of wheat and wine mixed together, we tighten the holy bonds that unite us, of charity, of obedience loving and acknowledging the supreme authority of the Vicar of Jesus Christ on earth, the Roman Pontiff, the jurisdiction of your legitimate diocesan pastor with all the laws and directives of our Mother, the Roman Apostolic Catholic Church.

We also invite to this communion of faith and charity those who were one day, our brothers, and are living now, done to the sedation of error on the spirit schism, separated from the obedience to the Pope.

May they consider as true, these prodigal sons that they will find their father, with open arms at any hour that they return contrite to the home abandoned, and their return will give to the angels of heaven greater joy than the perseverance of the other faithful sons. With pleadings of more intimate and paternal affection, we desire ardently to call these strayed sons of ours to toast and taste the mercy and pardon of divine clemency. If only they would and not want more time to harden their hearts to the invitations that, through their legitimate Pastor, the Holy Spirit now makes, and they do not depreciate this new grace of heaven, if they do not

want to secure his indignation and punishment. Before, on the contrary, may they meditate on their responsibility and the hour of the supreme justice and seek for the grace of reconciliation at the opportune time.

As we have started, we want to end desiring for all the clergy of Nueva Segovia the precious gift of unity for the priestly charity and piety (saintliness). Imploring, therefore the maternal intercession of the Most Holy Virgin, and invoking the infinite merits of Jesus, the Redeemer, we repeat his priestly prayer. "O Holy Father! Guard in your Name, those whom you have given me that they may be one in Love. I have given them your doctrine, and the world has hated them, because they are not of this world. Sanctify them in truth."

Let us work and pray without ceasing, my beloved priests, until in the whole diocese will flourish holiness, piety, the zeal of the ministers of the Lord, the teaching and Christian life of the faithful together with the glory of God. In exchange of these heavenly gifts, we give you, with all the affections of our Pastoral Blessing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Lipa, 25 March 1926.

**f ALFREDO VERZOSA**  
*Bishop of Lipa and  
Apostolic Administrator  
of Nueva Segovia*



## CONSULTATIVE WORDS

### Cases and Inquiries

JAVIER GONZALEZ, O.P.

#### CREMATION: A VALID OPTION FOR CATHOLICS?

*Is cremation a valid option for Catholics? What is the current stand of the Catholic Church on cremation? What may be the reasons to opt either for cremation or for traditional burial? Are there church guidelines on cremation in the Philippines?*

It is not the first time that I receive letters with questions about cremation. In fact, there is a number of Catholics who either out of ignorance or for personal guidance or even for their peace of mind keep asking clarificatory questions on the matter. The above formulated questions, namely, on whether cremation is (or not) a valid option for Catholics; on the current stand of the Catholic Church on cremation; on the reasons that lead people to opt either for traditional burial or for cremation; and on the existence of religious guidelines on cremation in the Philippines, etc., are just typical queries.

I will elaborate a short answer to these points.

## ***Is Cremation a Valid Option for Catholics?***

Yes, cremation is considered nowadays a valid option for Catholics as an acceptable way of disposing the body of their beloved.

It is true that inhumation (burial) is still largely practiced among Catholics - the Philippines is just an example. Influenced by culture, customs and religious beliefs, Catholics at large see still in the traditional burial the ordinary way of disposing the body of their beloved; and this situation is not likely to change in a near future.

Yet, in recent years, cremation has been constantly gaining acceptance, especially in urban areas. Even families with strong traditional religious background are adopting the practice of cremation as an ordinary way of disposing the body of their beloved -at times the dead themselves are the ones who had expressly requested it in their last will. Indeed, Catholics in general do not seem to be surprised any more about cremation, like they do not seem to be surprised any more at attending funeral Masses in the presence of an urn containing the ashes of the beloved relative or friend deceased.

What has changed in this regard? At least, two determining factors: First, the change of the Catholic Church's stand on cremation, a practice nowadays permitted. Second, the change of mentality and of circumstances brought about by the times, which has made possible to look at cremation with new eyes and easily accept the validity of the reasons for opting for cremation instead of traditional burial.

Because of these two reasons, the practice of cremation has become nowadays a valid option for Catholics.

### ***What is the Current Stand of the Catholic Church on Cremation?***

The current stand of the Catholic Church on cremation is succinctly expressed in the Code of Canon Law (1983): "The Church earnestly recommends that the pious custom of burial be retained; but it does not forbid cremation, unless this is chosen for reasons which are contrary to christian teaching." (can. 1176, §3)

The same stand is repeated, although in positive terms, by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1994): "The Church permits cremation, provided that it does not demonstrate a denial of faith in the resurrection of the body." (no. 2301)

Actually the source of both texts is an Instruction issued by the Vatican Congregation of the Faith on May 8, 1963 [AAS (1964), 822] in which cremation is permitted as a legitimate mode of disposing the dead body of the faithful, provided the reason for choosing cremation did not stem from "a denial of Christian dogmas, the animosity of a secret society, or hatred of the Catholic religion and the Church." Still the Instruction recalled that "the practice of reverently burying the faithful departed should be preserved."

Catholics, therefore, who choose cremation either for themselves or for the bodies of their relatives, for reasons not contrary to Christian life and tenets (e.g., a sectarian spirit, hatred

of the Catholic Church, or denial of dogmas such as the resurrection of the dead), but for reasons of a purely social or private nature, are legitimately entitled to ecclesiastical burial.

Cremation in itself is not something intrinsically evil or inherently incompatible with the Christian religion.

Why is it, then, that the Church in the past forbade Catholics to cremate the bodies of those who died and, furthermore, stipulated that those whose bodies were to be cremated would be denied funeral rites?

To understand this we need to go back to the situation in Europe of the 19th century, when certain individuals and groups started choosing cremation as a public protest against Christian belief in the resurrection of the body. In the historical context in which it developed, cremation was equivalent to a challenge thrown in the face of the Church. And it was precisely this attitude of irreligion, rather than any particular form of disposing of human remains, that the Church wished to eradicate by the severity of her legislation.

Inasmuch as in modern times that widespread attitude of using cremation as an act of defiance against Christian religion has somehow disappeared, the attitude of the Church has completely changed.

The updated legislation is benefiting not only Catholic hospitals ("...Hospitals may dispose of members of bodies in a manner they deem most opportune or hygienic"), but also families of when in some instances the practice of burial has becoming an unbearable duty, a legal problem, a financial burden.

***What may be the reasons to opt either for cremation or for traditional burial?***

"Burial or cremation?" This question is becoming increasingly common at the time of arranging funerals. People often compare the traditional funeral service versus the cremation memorial type service. Given the fact that both burial and cremation are two fitting ways of disposing the bodies of the departed, and presuming likewise the proper motives and intentions, the final decision is normally left to the closest concerned relatives or persons involved. The option is commonly based on religious and cultural factors.

What may be the reasons that make people opt either for one or for the other? I venture to point out some of them:

*(1) Reasons in favor of cremation:*

Simplicity, lower cost of body disposal, aesthetic (not wanting the body to be in the earth) and saving land are among the reasons alleged by those who prefer cremation. Thus,

- a) An instinctive horror of being buried in the earth or an abhorrence of the process of decomposition is a consideration of purely private nature by which a person may well be influenced in opting for cremation.
- b) In time of war, or during an epidemic or any other natural disaster, when it would be morally impossible to bury all the victims, cremation may become not only an alternative, but the only way to fittingly dispose of corpses.

- c) In some countries the shortage of ground for purposes of burial, especially in or rapidly expanding cities, may become so acute, or the price of such land may become so exorbitant, or the distance to the nearest cemetery may eventually involve such serious inconvenience and unwarranted expense, that cremation may soon become a public necessity for many people.
- d) Some others may express a wish to be cremated for hygienic reasons, or because, moved by a laudable humanitarian purpose, they may have decided to donate their body parts to a medical institution. In connection with this, hospitals are presently finding in cremation (incineration) the most feasible solution for ultimate disposal of dissected parts, major amputations and aborted fetuses, while in the past they were often overburdened with the responsibility of providing burial for them.

(2) *Reasons in favor of traditional burial:*

In contrast with the above reasons in favor of cremation, there are also others, in favor this time of traditional burial or interment, which enjoy highest regard in religious surroundings:

- a) Interment is a rite consecrated by an ancient tradition. The earliest fashion of the Church shows us that Christians began burying the bodies of their dead in much the same way as the ancient Jews. The catacombs and bodily relics of the saints and martyrs give evidence of the dignified burial rites of the early

Christians even though cremation was a usual practice in ancient pagan Rome.

- b) It has always seemed to be more attuned to the feelings of the people to commit the body to the earth and allow it, naturally and gradually, to resolve into its component elements. Cremation was looked upon also by the Church as too violent - and hence disrespectful - a way of treating the bodies of Christ's faithful: they are holy; they have been sanctified by the sacraments, especially by the Eucharist, and hallowed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit; they are due to rise in glory on the Last Day, according to our Christian hope.
- c) Interment has a didactic value for all. The committal of the human body to the earth from which it was originally derived reminds us that death is the result of sin, and of the fact that we are only pilgrims on our way home. The word cemetery means sleeping place: for here the bodies are laid to rest after their earthly labors to await the summons to an eternal reward at the sound of the last trumpet. This seems to be the message perceived while visiting a cemetery, dramatic reminders indeed of life and death.
- d) In addition, burial was for many years made compulsory by the Catholic Church as a reaction against the practice of cremation, which because of the historical context in which it developed implied

an attitude of irreligion and challenge to the Church itself. In modern times, however, that widespread attitude has lost its contextual meaning and, consequently, the attitude of the Church has also changed.

Catholic cemeteries stand as visible, dramatic reminders of the Christian understanding of life, death, and resurrection. Their names themselves, the crosses on top of the tombs, the allegories of the resurrection, the symbols of hope, the flowers, the uttered prayers... mean something!

It is not difficult then to understand why most believers in the resurrection of the body still consider the long-standing practice of burying the body of the deceased in a grave or tomb - following the example of Jesus whose own body was placed in a tomb - as the most fitting way of disposing the bodies of their beloved, and why the Church earnestly recommends that the "pious custom of burial" be retained.

### ***Are there Church Guidelines on Cremation in the Philippines?***

If the expression "church guidelines" refers here to norms issued or adopted by the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) on cremation, then I can answer that indeed there are guidelines on this matter in the Philippines.

To begin with, the stand of the Philippine Hierarchy on this issue of cremation is obviously the same stand of the universal Church on it, that is, cremation is permitted as a legitimate mode of disposing the dead body of the faithful, provided the



reasons for choosing cremation does not stem from "a denial of Christian dogmas, the animosity of a secret society, or hatred of the Catholic religion and the Church."

In 1984 the CBCP issued some complementary norms to the Code of Canon Law on a number of issues. On this particular one of cremation, in legislating about Funeral Masses and Rites, the Conference simply limited itself to repeat the recommendation that "it still is the express desire of the Church that the venerable tradition and practice of burying the dead be earnestly observed when reasonably possible (can. 1176 §3)." (Cf. Testera, *Canon Law Digest of the Philippine Catholic Church*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1995, p. 78).

The newest guidelines on cremation for the Philippines are, as far as I know, dated September 18, 2001, and were issued by the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy, with the approval of the CBCP. The guidelines were aimed not only to enlighten the faithful on the mind of the Church on cremation, but also to correct certain abusive practices on the matter. "In recent years," the circular reads, "certain practices surrounding cremation have arisen that are not in accord with the mind of the Church. For this reason the Episcopal Commission on Liturgy, with the approval of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, lays down the following guidelines."

1. Cremation may take place after or before the funeral Mass.
2. When cremation is held after funeral Mass, the rite of final commendation and committal concludes the

Mass. While cremation is taking place the family and friends of the deceased are encouraged to gather in prayer. A liturgy of the Word may be celebrated or devotional prayers like the holy rosary may be said. After cremation the ashes are placed in a worthy urn and carried reverently to the place of burial.

3. When cremation precedes the funeral Mass, the rite of the final commendation and committal may be performed in the crematorium chapel before cremation. After cremation the funeral Mass may be celebrated in the presence of the cremated remains. If funeral Mass is not celebrated, the funeral liturgy is held in the presence of the remains. The rite of final commendation and committal concludes the Mass or the funeral liturgy, if the rite has not taken place before cremation. Adaptations such as "remains" in place of "body" are made in the liturgical formularies.
4. The cremated remains should be buried in grave, mausoleum, or columbarium. The practice of scattering the ashes in the sea or from the air is not in keeping with the church's norm regarding the proper disposal of the remains of the dead. Likewise the urn should not be kept permanently at home or family altar. If there is to be a delay in the proper disposal of the ashes, these may be kept temporarily in an appropriate place.
5. For the sake of reverence for the remains of the dead, it is recommended that in churches or chapels a worthy

container be provided in which the urn is placed during the liturgical celebration.

6. Columbaria should not be constructed in the main body of the church but in a separate chapel adjacent to the church or in a crypt. (Circular No. 2.001-51, September 18, 2001; cf. *BEF*, LXXVII, 827 (2001), 870-872)

### ***Closing Thought***

"I have nothing against cremation, but I still can't get my mind around it. I want to follow the traditional way we do it." This remark from a Filipino friend of mine seems to me the typical expression of how most people in the Philippines feel about cremation.

Perhaps the determining factor that explains why cremation is seldom practiced in the Philippines is because the presence of the body is seen as very important. First, during the wake, which lasts from four days to a week and during which relatives and friends have the last chance to see their loved ones; then, in the cemetery, where the presence of the interred body evokes living memories and through these the presence of the person itself in the family circle, as commemorated every year on All Saints/Souls Day.

In any case, whether traditional burial or cremation, the option becomes secondary in the presence of the amazing mystery of Life after Death: *"This body [these remains] was/were the temple of the Holy Spirit, and one day will rise to eternal glory."* They are dramatic yet sublime words the

liturgical minister pronounces at the farewell funeral celebration, while honoring the bodily remains with holy water and, when possible, with burning incense. The words are equally valid whether pronounced before a coffin as the body is definitively commended to the earth, or before an urn containing the ashes as it is deposited in a grave, a mausoleum or columbarium.

# A Proposed Campaign for the Billings Method according to Catholic Teachings

TONY ROXAS

## *Introduction*

This paper is a proposed campaign for the Billings Method as taught by the Catholic Church. This method has been chosen among other natural family planning methods because of its simplicity (easy-to-teach and learn) and its high rate of success (97%-98.9%). This is an attempt, therefore, to satisfy the *urgent need* for *CONCRETE* and *SPECIFIC* solutions to the problem of morally responsible family planning.

For a very long time now, it seems that we have been trying to fight *concrete* threats with *ABSTRACT* remedies. When, for example, anti-life adherents propose effective artificial contraceptive methods, we vigorously object to the *IMMORALITY* (abstract) of such methods but *FAIL* miserably to offer *SPECIFIC* natural methods as *CONCRETE ALTERNATIVES* that are effective, safe, and moral. And we continue to do so up to this

time in spite of our knowing so well that general rule in human psychology that something *ABSTRACT CANNOT COMPETE* with something *CONCRETE* when it comes to satisfying concrete and specific human needs and desires. To no one's surprise, therefore, we have been steadily losing the battle for the hearts and minds of our people on the issue of family planning. It is no doubt out of divine inspiration, and an urgently needed development within the Church, that His holiness, Pope John Paul II, has announced the imminent mobilization of the world's bishops in a worldwide campaign for natural family planning methods (Please see attached copy of news item, *Life Today* magazine, March 1993, p. 3). *ONLY* by doing this shall we be able to turn the tide in God's favor.

Seen within the context of this papal announcement, the urgency to act correctly, effectively, and decisively in campaigning for natural family planning methods becomes even more acute. It is hoped, therefore, that this proposal may merit some serious study, and, if eventually approved, implemented with professional excellence for the sake of the faithful in the Archdiocese of Manila and throughout the country.

This work and its final outcome are lovingly consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, Mother of Life and Love.

*A Proposed Campaign for the Billings Method  
according to Catholic Teachings  
(March 2005 Revision of 1993 Original Proposal)*

The ESSENTIALS of this proposal are as follows:

- 1) The *ELECTRONIC* lecture via VHS/VCD
- 2) CORETRAINORS
- 3) ECHO trainors from parishes

- 4) Parishes as training centers of the BM
- 5) Core Organizations

The technical aspects of the Billings Method (BM) training program for parish level ECHO trainers shall consist mainly of two parts - 1) GENERAL Information (What It Is) - can also be viewed by the general public (from 3<sup>rd</sup> year high school - up), and 2) SPECIFIC Information (How To Use It) - strictly for married couples only.

GENERAL information (What It Is) on the BM shall consist of the anatomy and physiology of the female reproductive organs and the ovulation cycle. It should be made clear that there are *safe* and *unsafe* periods, based on the ovulation cycle. Also included shall be an explanation of what happens at the moment of fertilization and the development of the embryo until childbirth. ALL this GENERAL information, as well as ALL related matters that can be CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD without any need of LIVE lectures, shall be presented in a VHS/VCD in ANIMATION.

All parts of this General Information shall be expertly crafted for clarity so that LIVE lecturers will not, or hardly have to, emphasize what was already presented in it.

Note: This GENERAL Information, or parts of it, may also be shown to the general public, Catholic or otherwise, for proper scientific information on the NATURAL BASIS of natural family planning (NFP) methods, provided matters classified as SPECIFIC Information (How To Use It) intended *strictly for married couples* are excluded. This GENERAL Information may also be integrated wholly or partly in religion subjects of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year high school up to college, as proposed in Study No. 4.

SPECIFIC information (How To Use It) on the BM which shall be given *only to married couples* in parish centers shall consist of ALL those aspects that CANNOT be presented in VHS/VCD, because a LIVE explanation is an ABSOLUTE NECESSITY. This would include LIVE lectures on how to use the calendar and the FOLLOW-UP MONITORING of married couples' compliance with the BM's training instructions, and all other aspects of the program that can only be explained effectively and understood clearly through LIVE lectures.

*1) The ELECTRONIC Lecture via VHS/VCD*

- a) A 45 minute-to 1-hour General Information as described above will be prepared in ANIMATION. As an introduction, this electronic lecture shall contain a 5-10 minute NON-ANIMATED exposition of the Church's moral teachings on human life, human sexuality, and the need for natural family planning methods (NFP) emphasizing their conformity to Church teachings, followed by the animated portion that shall end by saying that the BM has a success rate of 97%-98.9% for BOTH IRREGULAR and regular ovulation cycles. Concluding this electronic lecture shall be a 5-10 minute testimonial of couples who have successfully used the Billings Method. Better known personalities who have used the BM would greatly help, especially if they have had traumatic experiences with the use of artificial contraceptives.

Trigger words and phrases should be carefully chosen and inserted in the testimonials.



- b) In the non-animated portions, the persons chosen to appear on VHS/VCD should have good cinematic qualities such as charm and a good speaking voice with an aura of sincerity and authority that is so evident.
- c) This electronic lecture will ALWAYS be the first part of any training program for ECHO trainors of parishes.
- d) This electronic lecture will *always insure the doctrinal integrity* of any Catholic sponsored program on natural family planning methods.
- e) This electronic lecture will guarantee the clarity in communicating Catholic teachings and will compensate for some echo trainors' inability to teach or speak effectively.
- f) The original and official text of the electronic lecture shall be in English by reason of the language's relative exactness.
- g) As this campaign progresses, dioceses in other parts of the country that may want to use the same electronic lecture may have it dubbed in their respective dialects.
- h) To insure authenticity of church teachings and to prevent possible sabotage, the archbishop and/or bishop concerned MUST CERTIFY the authenticity of the VHS/VCD electronic lecture being shown in his area of jurisdiction.

### *WARNING*

*UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES* should this electronic lecture be hurriedly done. Considering its delicate, pivotal, and

all-encompassing role in the campaign for natural family planning methods, it must be prepared with utmost professional competence and artistic delicacy, or not at all. A mediocre or defective electronic lecture will only be *counterproductive*!

2) *Parishes in Metro Manila and Throughout the Country as Training Centers for the Billings Method*

- a) Every parish shall become the training center for the Billings Method.
- b) To have competent trainers in this undertaking, every Parish shall select 2 or 3, but in no case less than 1 couple(s), who shall be thoroughly trained to become ECHO trainers in their respective Parish Training Centers.
- c) c-1) The parish priest must *carefully* select the prospective ECHO trainers who shall play a *crucial* and *pivotal* role in the promotion of natural family planning (NFP) methods in the parish.  
  
c-2) Special attention should be given to the couple's spiritual life, their *consistent* advocacy of church teachings on human life, and their interest and resolve to bring God's word on human life to His people.  
  
c-3) Much emphasis should also be given to their ability to teach and their effectiveness in communication.
- d) For maximum impact at the start of the training program for echo trainers, the VHS/CD electronic lecture will *always* be shown at the beginning of the seminar, to be followed by the LIVE lectures of the *CORE* trainers (Ms.

Linda Ganar, Sister Pilar Verzosa, Ms. Emma Culanag, or others chosen by the diocese for their competence).

- e) Upon returning to their respective parishes, specially when baranggay level BM training programs are to be conducted for 10 or more married couples, echo trainors will also begin the training of married couples by first showing the electronic lecture, to be followed by then-own live lectures.
- f) Making parishes the training centers for the BM gives the Church a *QUALITATIVE* advantage to reach its parishioners at the grassroots level, to compensate for the government's *QUANTITATIVE* advantage, which the Church cannot match.

NOTE: The crucial key here is the *CONCENTRATION* of resources on a *CONTINUING* basis.

- g) Depending on the demand, more couples in the parish should be encouraged to become echo trainors. As their numbers increase, and as they develop their skills in teaching the BM, some echo trainors could turn their attention to Catholic schools within their parish or diocese and conduct training programs on the BM for Parent-Teachers Associations (PTAs). Eventually, they could also offer their expertise to the PTAs of Public Schools within their area.

NOTE:

As a rule, the parish priest must support and help the trainors in matters such as, but not limited to, securing the approval of Catholic School Administrators for these

seminars. A letter of request from the Bishops or Archbishops concerned could greatly help.

- h) The parish priest should be instructed to help this BM campaign wholeheartedly. He should be made to understand that the Church's real battle ground for winning or losing the hearts and minds of our people on the issue of population control is right *in his own parish* - *WHEREVER* and *WHENEVER* his echo trainors go into action to propagate the BM, and not just in Sunday pulpits or during homilies which, although good and necessary, will only provide *ABSTRACT*, but *NEVER* the *CONCRETE*, remedies that *ONLY* his parish echo trainors can give.
- i) The parish priest should be instructed to secure the material and spiritual help of the parishioners in this pro-life endeavor, which can easily be perceived as the acid test for the Church's sincerity in its pro-life teachings - providing a *real, tangible, concrete* and *specific NATURAL* tool for child spacing that embodies the reverence for human life.

### 3) *The Need for Organizational Support: Core Groups*

Now that there is at least one mandated organization propagating the BM, the Couples for Christ, given the vast area of the country and the overwhelming 70 million Catholic population (80%-85% of Filipinos), it would greatly help the NFP cause to get the support of other mandated groups to help out. Perhaps the Legion of Mary and the Christian Family Movement could greatly boost the pro-life cause. But definitely the organizations chosen

should be known for fidelity to official Church teachings and should be in *close* and *continuous* contact with parishioners at the grassroots level to insure the intimacy, smoothness, and directness of the "Catholic Technology Transfer" of the BM from the echo trainors to the recipient couples within the parish community. This way the campaign will *always be alive* within the grassroots community of the parish.

### *THREE INEVITABLE CONCLUSIONS*

The country's inundation with anti-life propaganda resulting in the re-alignment of beliefs and loyalties to church teachings leads to three inevitable but clear and distinct conclusions.

First, that the Church can *never* rely on the religious piety of its leaders to protect or propagate its pro-life teachings. This is so glaringly proven by the regimes of two devout Catholic lady presidents that did not translate into substantially greater acceptance of a clearly distinct pro-life culture among the citizenry. It is the Church and *ONLY* the Church that can protect its own interests and propagate its teachings. The political leadership, if led by devout Catholics, can at best offer only *a. friendlier* or *non-hostile* attitude or openness to the Church's pro-life campaign, which in itself already poses a great advantage that should not be allowed to slip away. But to expect much more would be to overstrain what is possible because in the end the issue of separation between church and state can always be invoked for or against the church, depending on which of these two entities feels threatened.

Second, that the ultimate and crucial battle ground for winning or losing the hearts and minds of the people on the issue of population control is in the *parish communities, where the*

*government health centers are also located!* It is precisely in parish communities where the Church must deploy its *well-trained 'SOLDIERS'* to propagate the BM as the *concrete embodiment* of its little understood, and oftentimes maligned for being abstract, teaching on the reverence for human life and the natural channels of life. The day could be fast approaching when, God forbid, the faithful might measure the Church's credibility and sincerity in its pro-life teachings in terms of how well or how poorly it propagates a *tangible, concrete and specific NATURAL* tool for child spacing.

Third, victory can be won by the Church in this battle for hearts and minds depending on the *number* of echo trainors it develops, the *number* of parishes covered, and the *speed* at which the trainors are correctly and efficiently deployed.

Meanwhile the far advanced and sophisticated types of anti-life propaganda that have caused a sense of helplessness and near despair among the ranks of church workers and the faithful can still be overturned in God's favor. But the Church *must act decisively now* and must arm her helpless but faithful children with the power of truth 'hidden' in Her pro-life teachings *that truth* that will set everyone free.\*

### ***AN OPTIONAL REMINDER FOR TRAINORS***

It may be worth remembering that in the end, what *looks* like a battle for the hearts and minds of men from the outside is *in reality* a war that rages fiercely underneath to *win or lose the souls* of men. For next to the *act* of murder and the slaying of innocents, what can arouse God's concern more than the *loss* or the *waning* of one's *reverence* for human life, the centerpiece of His creation?

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