

# BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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## *EDITORIAL*

This issue highlights two very important Vatican documents which will surely create ripples in our society and the local Church - the first-ever Encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI, and the Instruction on the discernment of vocations regarding persons with homosexual tendencies.

### *The Encyclical*

Pope Benedict XVI deemed it fit to remind us that God's name is Love. He appropriately prefaces his Encyclical with these words: "In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence ... I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others."

Accordingly, the first part of the Encyclical aims to clarify the essence of God's love as it is offered to us in a mysterious and gratuitous way. The second part deals with the more challenging aspect of actually shaping our lives according to the demands of such love. Basically, the Encyclical invites us to embark on a crusade aimed at healing a world wounded by indifference, apathy, and alienation.

In Asia, the Encyclical was welcomed enthusiastically by Church leaders. Monsignor Tadeusz Kondrusiewicz, Archbishop of Moscow said: "I am very happy that the Holy Father energetically stressed the fact that the Church's charitable works must not serve as an instrument to convert or to proselytize. Over the past 15 years, we have continued to remind people in Russia that, in our social efforts, our

ultimate objective is to help the human being in need." The Russian Orthodox Church has always been very critical of would-be *proselytism* carried out by Catholics in post-Soviet regions. This is an on-going source of tension between the two religious communities.

Archbishop Kondrusiewicz also said that the encyclical aroused considerable interest in the Russian press. "Many journalists were amazed by the fact that the Pope was not afraid to speak about love even in the delicate terms of its more physical meaning, as *eros*."

Meanwhile, Msgr. Nicholas Cheong Jin-suk, Archbishop of Seoul commented: "The Pope made a clear and precise explanation of the meaning of *agape*, *eros* and charity. Koreans must understand the difference between these concepts. I believe that our Holy Father thought of Asia as he wrote this encyclical, because the people of Asia are those who have the greatest need to understand the difference between the various forms of love."

Stefano Fontana, the Director of the Cardinal Van Thuan International Observatory called *Deus Caritas Est* a social encyclical. He opined: "In 1891 Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum* ended with a hymn to charity which he called: 'mistress and queen of all virtues.' The Pope, with some degree of courage at the time, stated that 'the happy results we all hope for must be chiefly brought about by the plenteous outpouring of charity.'"

Fontana regards *Deus Caritas Est* as a social encyclical, since it addresses contemporary social problems from the standpoint of the perennial Church teaching on charity. "As a theological virtue, charity emanates directly from the life

of the Trinity itself, and as a human virtue, is the first condition by which men live and work together."

Commenting on Benedict XVI's treatment of the relation between justice and charity, Stefano declared: "In this Encyclical, charity makes justice itself possible. Not only because the poor are always going to be with us, as the Gospel says - and therefore there is no just state system which might make love's service superfluous - but especially because charity purifies justice, just as faith cleanses reason. This is a pivotal concept in the Encyclical. The social doctrine of the Church is actually based on this task of purification. Charity does not step in only when justice has run its course, but helps justice to fulfill itself, at the same time as it exceeds justice. Faith too is not juxtaposed to reason when the latter has run its course, but helps reason to better fulfill itself."

### ***The Instruction***

On August 31, 2005, the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, approved and ordered the publication of the Instruction *Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with Regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in View of Their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders*. Consequently, the Instruction was published on November 29, 2005 by the Congregation for Catholic Education, which oversees seminary formation. Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, Prefect of the Congregation, and Archbishop Michael Miller, Secretary, had previously signed the document in Rome on November 4, 2005.

The document is an *Instruction*, which means that it does not create new Church law but rather clarifies existing policies. It is primarily addressed to bishops, religious

superiors, seminary personnel and others involved in priestly formation. The final form of the document was preceded by a long process of consultation. The draft version was prepared in 1998, reviewed and revised in 2002 and 2005, and circulated among different Vatican dicasteries before it was approved by Pope Benedict XVI.

In issuing the *Instruction*, the Congregation for Education observed that the need for a clear policy regarding homosexual candidates for the priesthood had been "made more urgent by the current situation" - an apparent reference to the sex-abuse crisis afflicting many dioceses, especially in North America.

On December 02, 2005, the Congregation on Catholic Education further issued a letter accompanying the *Instruction* wherein it advised against the appointment of homosexual priests as teachers or Rectors in Catholic seminaries.

The letter emphasizes that the *Instruction* does not call into question the validity of the ordination of priests who have homosexual tendencies, but it considers such priests as unfit to serve in seminaries because of "the particular responsibility of those charged with the formation of future priests." The cover letter also underlines the importance of the Vatican policy, stating that "it is clear that the aforementioned norms are to be faithfully observed by all superiors."

In the Philippines, this *Instruction* seems to have been gobbled up by more controversial issues, like politics, economics, and the moral ascendancy of government leaders. Nevertheless, the *Instruction* will, hopefully, give rise to a serious review of local policies and practices in vocation discernment.

THE EDITOR

## **FEATURES**

# Deus Caritas Est

**POPE BENEDICT XVI**

## **INTRODUCTION**

1. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (7 *Jn* 4:16). These words from the *First Letter of John* express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith: the Christian image of God and the resulting image of mankind and its destiny. In the same verse, Saint John also offers a kind of summary of the Christian life: "We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us".

*We have come to believe in God's love:* in these words the Christian can express the fundamental decision of his life. Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction. Saint John's Gospel describes that event in these words: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should ... have eternal life" (3:16). In acknowledging the centrality of love, Christian faith has retained the core of Israel's faith, while at the same time



giving it new depth and breadth. The pious Jew prayed daily the words of the *Book of Deuteronomy* which expressed the heart of his existence: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God is one Lord, and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might" (6:4-5). Jesus united into a single precept this commandment of love for God and the commandment of love for neighbour found in the *Book of Leviticus*: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself (19:18; cf. *Mk* 12:29-31). Since God has first loved us (cf. *1 Jn* 4:10), love is now no longer a mere "command"; it is the response to the gift of love with which God draws near to us.

In a world where the name of God is sometimes associated with vengeance or even a duty of hatred and violence, this message is both timely and significant. For this reason, I wish in my first Encyclical to speak of the love which God lavishes upon us and which we in turn must share with others. That, in essence, is what the two main parts of this Letter are about, and they are profoundly interconnected. The first part is more speculative, since I wanted here - at the beginning of my Pontificate - to clarify some essential facts concerning the love which God mysteriously and gratuitously offers to man, together with the intrinsic link between that Love and the reality of human love. The second part is more concrete, since it treats the ecclesial exercise of the commandment of love of neighbour. The argument has vast implications, but a lengthy treatment would go beyond the scope of the present Encyclical. I wish to emphasize some basic elements, so as to call forth in the world renewed energy and commitment in the human response to God's love.

**PART I**  
**THE UNITY OF LOVE IN CREATION**  
**AND IN SALVATION HISTORY**

*A Problem of Language*

2. God's love for us is fundamental for our lives, and it raises important questions about who God is and who we are. In considering this, we immediately find ourselves hampered by a problem of language. Today, the term "love" has become one of the most frequently used and misused of words, a word to which we attach quite different meanings. Even though this Encyclical will deal primarily with the understanding and practice of love in sacred Scripture and in the Church's Tradition, we cannot simply prescind from the meaning of the word in the different cultures and in present-day usage.

Let us first of all bring to mind the vast semantic range of the word "love": we speak of love of country, love of one's profession, love between friends, love of work, love between parents and children, love between family members, love of neighbour and love of God. Amid this multiplicity of meanings, however, one in particular stands out: love between man and woman, where body and soul are inseparably joined and human beings glimpse an apparently irresistible promise of happiness. This would seem to be the very epitome of love; all other kinds of love immediately seem to fade in comparison. So we need to ask: are all these forms of love basically one, so that love, in its many and varied manifestations, is ultimately a single reality, or are we merely using the same word to designate totally different realities?

## *"Eros" and "Agape" - Difference and Unity*

3. That love between man and woman which is neither planned nor willed, but somehow imposes itself upon human beings, was called *eros* by the ancient Greeks. Let us note straight away that the Greek Old Testament uses the word *eros* only twice, while the New Testament does not use it at all: of the three Greek words for love, *eros*, *philia* (the love of friendship) and *agape*, New Testament writers prefer the last, which occurs rather infrequently in Greek usage. As for the term *philia*, the love of friendship, it is used with added depth of meaning in Saint John's Gospel in order to express the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The tendency to avoid the word *eros*, together with the new vision of love expressed through the word *agape*, clearly point to something new and distinct about the Christian understanding of love. In the critique of Christianity which began with the Enlightenment and grew progressively more radical, this new element was seen as something thoroughly negative. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, Christianity had poisoned *eros*, which for its part, while not completely succumbing, gradually degenerated into vice.' Here the German philosopher was expressing a widely-held perception: doesn't the Church, with all her commandments and prohibitions, turn to bitterness the most precious thing in life? Doesn't she blow the whistle just when the joy which is the Creator's gift offers us a happiness which is itself a certain foretaste of the Divine?

4. But is this the case? Did Christianity really destroy *eros*? Let us take a look at the pre-Christian world. The Greeks - not unlike other cultures - considered *eros* principally as a kind of

Cf. *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, IV. 168.

intoxication, the overpowering of reason by a "divine madness" which tears man away from his finite existence and enables him, in the very process of being overwhelmed by divine power, to experience supreme happiness. All other powers in heaven and on earth thus appear secondary: "*Omnia vincit amor*" says Virgil in the *Bucolics* - love conquers all - and he adds: "*et nos cedamus amori*" - let us, too, yield to love.<sup>2</sup> In the religions, this attitude found expression in fertility cults, part of which was the "sacred" prostitution which flourished in many temples. *Eros* was thus celebrated as divine power, as fellowship with the Divine.

The Old Testament firmly opposed this form of religion, which represents a powerful temptation against monotheistic faith, combating it as a perversion of religiosity. But it in no way rejected *eros* as such; rather, it declared war on a warped and destructive form of it, because this counterfeit divinization of *eros* actually strips it of its dignity and dehumanizes it. Indeed, the prostitutes in the temple, who had to bestow this divine intoxication, were not treated as human beings and persons, but simply used as a means of arousing "divine madness": far from being goddesses, they were human persons being exploited. An intoxicated and undisciplined *eros*, then, is not an ascent in "ecstasy" towards the Divine, but a fall, a degradation of man. Evidently, *eros* needs to be disciplined and purified if it is to provide not just fleeting pleasure, but a certain foretaste of the pinnacle of our existence, of that beatitude for which our whole being yearns.

5. Two things emerge clearly from this rapid overview of the concept of *eros* past and present. First, there is a certain relationship between love and the Divine: love promises infinity,

<sup>2</sup>X. 69.

eternity - a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence. Yet we have also seen that the way to attain this goal is not simply by submitting to instinct. Purification and growth in maturity are called for; and these also pass through the path of renunciation. Far from rejecting or "poisoning" *eros*, they heal it and restore its true grandeur.

This is due first and foremost to the fact that man is a being made up of body and soul. Man is truly himself when his body and soul are intimately united; the challenge of *eros* can be said to be truly overcome when this unification is achieved. Should he aspire to be pure spirit and to reject the flesh as pertaining to his animal nature alone, then spirit and body would both lose their dignity. On the other hand, should he deny the spirit and consider matter, the body, as the only reality, he would likewise lose his greatness. The epicure Gassendi used to offer Descartes the humorous greeting: "O Soul!" And Descartes would reply: "O Flesh!".<sup>3</sup> Yet it is neither the spirit alone nor the body alone that loves: it is man, the person, a unified creature composed of body and soul, who loves. Only when both dimensions are truly united, does man attain his full stature. Only thus is love - *eros* - able to mature and attain its authentic grandeur.

Nowadays Christianity of the past is often criticized as having been opposed to the body; and it is quite true that tendencies of this sort have always existed. Yet the contemporary way of exalting the body is deceptive. *Eros*, reduced to pure "sex", has become a commodity, a mere "thing" to be bought and sold, or rather, man himself becomes a commodity. This is hardly man's great "yes" to the body. On the contrary, he now considers his body and his

<sup>3</sup> Cf. R. Descartes. (*Euvres*. ed. V. Cousin, vol. 12. Paris 1824. pp. 95ff.

sexuality as the purely material part of himself, to be used **and** exploited at will. Nor does he see it as an arena for the exercise of his freedom, but as a mere object that he attempts, as he pleases, to make both enjoyable and harmless. Here we are actually dealing with a debasement of the human body: no longer is it integrated into our overall existential freedom; no longer is it a vital expression of our whole being, but it is more or less relegated to the purely biological sphere. The apparent exaltation of the body can quickly turn into a hatred of bodiliness. Christian faith, on the other hand, has always considered man a unity in duality, a reality in which spirit and matter compenetrates, and in which each is brought to a new nobility. True, *ems* tends to rise "in ecstasy" towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification and healing.

6. Concretely, what does this path of ascent and purification entail? How might love be experienced so that it can fully realize its human and divine promise? Here we can find a first, important indication in the *Song of Songs*, an Old Testament book well known to the mystics. According to the interpretation generally held today, the poems contained in this book were originally love-songs, perhaps intended for a Jewish wedding feast and meant to exalt conjugal love. In this context it is highly instructive to note that in the course of the book two different Hebrew words are used to indicate "love". First there is the word *dodim*, a plural form suggesting a love that is still insecure, indeterminate and searching. This comes to be replaced by the word *ahaba*, which the Greek version of the Old Testament translates with the similar-sounding *agape*, which, as we have seen, becomes the typical expression for the biblical notion of love. By contrast with an indeterminate, "searching" love, this word expresses the experience of a love

which involves a real discovery of the other, moving beyond the selfish character that prevailed earlier. Love now becomes concern and care for the other. No longer is it self-seeking, a sinking in the intoxication of happiness; instead it seeks the good of the beloved: it becomes renunciation and it is ready, and even willing, for sacrifice.

It is part of love's growth towards higher levels and inward purification that it now seeks to become definitive, and it does so in a twofold sense: both in the sense of exclusivity (this particular person alone) and in the sense of being "for ever". Love embraces the whole of existence in each of its dimensions, including the dimension of time. It could hardly be otherwise, since its promise looks towards its definitive goal: love looks to the eternal. Love is indeed "ecstasy", not in the sense of a moment of intoxication, but rather as a journey, an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery and indeed the discovery of God: "Whoever seeks to gain his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will preserve it" (*Lk* 17:33), as Jesus says throughout the Gospels (cf. *Mt* 10:39; 16:25; *Mk* 8:35; *Lk* 9:24; *Jn* 12:25). In these words, Jesus portrays his own path, which leads through the Cross to the Resurrection: the path of the grain of wheat that falls to the ground and dies, and in this way bears much fruit. Starting from the depths of his own sacrifice and of the love that reaches fulfillment therein, he also portrays in these words the essence of love and indeed of human life itself.

7. By their own inner logic, these initial, somewhat philosophical reflections on the essence of love have now brought us to the threshold of biblical faith. We began by asking whether the different, or even opposed, meanings of the word "love" point

to some profound underlying unity, or whether on the contrary they must remain unconnected, one alongside the other. More significantly, though, we questioned whether the message of love proclaimed to us by the Bible and the Church's Tradition has some points of contact with the common human experience of love, or whether it is opposed to that experience. This in turn led us to consider two fundamental words: *eros*, as a term to indicate "worldly" love and *agape*, referring to love grounded in and shaped by faith. The two notions are often contrasted as "ascending" love and "descending" love. There are other, similar classifications, such as the distinction between possessive love and oblation love (*amor concupiscentiae* - *amor benevolentiae*), to which is sometimes also added love that seeks its own advantage.

In philosophical and theological debate, these distinctions have often been radicalized to the point of establishing a clear antithesis between them: descending, oblation love - *agape* - would be typically Christian, while on the other hand ascending, possessive or covetous love - *eros* - would be typical of non-Christian, and particularly Greek culture. Were this antithesis to be taken to extremes, the essence of Christianity would be detached from the vital relations fundamental to human existence, and would become a world apart, admirable perhaps, but decisively cut off from the complex fabric of human life. Yet *eros* and *agape* - ascending love and descending love - can never be completely separated. The more the two, in their different aspects, find a proper unity in the one reality of love, the more the true nature of love in general is realized. Even if *eros* is at first mainly covetous and ascending, a fascination for the great promise of happiness, in drawing near to the other, it is less and less concerned with itself, increasingly seeks the happiness of the other, is concerned more and more with the beloved, bestows itself and wants to "be there



for" the other. The element of *agape* thus enters into this love, for otherwise *eros* is impoverished and even loses its own nature. On the other hand, man cannot live by oblation, descending love alone. He cannot always give, he must also receive. Anyone who wishes to give love must also receive love as a gift. Certainly, as the Lord tells us, one can become a source from which rivers of living water flow (cf. *Jn* 7:37-38). Yet to become such a source, one must constantly drink anew from the original source, which is Jesus Christ, from whose pierced heart flows the love of God (cf. *Jn* 19:34).

In the account of Jacob's ladder, the Fathers of the Church saw this inseparable connection between ascending and descending love, between *eros* which seeks God and *agape* which passes on the gift received, symbolized in various ways. In that biblical passage we read how the Patriarch Jacob saw in a dream, above the stone which was his pillow, a ladder reaching up to heaven, on which the angels of God were ascending and descending (cf. *Gen* 28:12; in 1:51). A particularly striking interpretation of this vision is presented by Pope Gregory the Great in his *Pastoral Rule*. He tells us that the good pastor must be rooted in contemplation. Only in this way will he be able to take upon himself the needs of others and make them his own: "*per pietatis viscera in se infirmitatem caeterorum transferat*".<sup>4</sup> Saint Gregory speaks in this context of Saint Paul, who was borne aloft to the most exalted mysteries of God, and hence, having descended once more, he was able to become all things to all men (cf. *2 Cor* 12:2-4; / *Cor* 9:22). He also points to the example of Moses, who entered the tabernacle time and again, remaining in dialogue with God, so that when he

<sup>4</sup>II, 5: SCh 381, 196.

emerged he could be at the service of his people. "Within [the tent] he is borne aloft through contemplation, while without he is completely engaged in helping those who suffer: *intus in contemplationem rapitur, foris infirmantium negotiis urgetur*. "<sup>5</sup>

8. We have thus come to an initial, albeit still somewhat generic response to the two questions raised earlier. Fundamentally, "love" is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly. Yet when the two dimensions are totally cut off from one another, the result is a caricature or at least an impoverished form of love. And we have also seen, synthetically, that biblical faith does not set up a parallel universe, or one opposed to that primordial human phenomenon which is love, but rather accepts the whole man; it intervenes in his search for love in order to purify it and to reveal new dimensions of it. This newness of biblical faith is shown chiefly in two elements which deserve to be highlighted: the image of God and the image of man.

### ***The Newness of Biblical Faith***

9. First, the world of the Bible presents us with a new image of God. In surrounding cultures, the image of God and of the gods ultimately remained unclear and contradictory. In the development of biblical faith, however, the content of the prayer fundamental to Israel, the *Shema*, became increasingly clear and unequivocal: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord" (*Dt* 6:4). There is only one God, the Creator of heaven and earth, who is thus the God of all. Two facts are significant about this statement: all other

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

gods are not God, and the universe in which we live has its source in God and was created by him. Certainly, the notion of creation is found elsewhere, yet only here does it become absolutely clear that it is not one god among many, but the one true God himself who is the source of all that exists; the whole world comes into existence by the power of his creative Word. Consequently, his creation is dear to him, for it was willed by him and "made" by him. The second important element now emerges: this God loves man. The divine power that Aristotle at the height of Greek philosophy sought to grasp through reflection, is indeed for every being an object of desire and of love - and as the object of love this divinity moves the world<sup>6</sup> - but in itself it lacks nothing and does not love: it is solely the object of love. The one God in whom Israel believes, on the other hand, loves with a personal love. His love, moreover, is an elective love: among all the nations he chooses Israel and loves her - but he does so precisely with a view to healing the whole human race. God loves, and his love may certainly be called *eros*, yet it is also totally *agape*.<sup>7</sup>

The Prophets, particularly Hosea and Ezekiel, described God's passion for his people using boldly erotic images. God's relationship with Israel is described using the metaphors of betrothal and marriage; idolatry is thus adultery and prostitution. Here we find a specific reference - as we have seen - to the fertility cults and their abuse of *eros*, but also a description of the relationship of fidelity between Israel and her God. The history of the love-relationship between God and Israel consists, at the deepest level, in the fact that he gives her the *Torah*, thereby

<sup>6</sup>Cf. *Metaphysics*, XII, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite, who in his treatise *The Divine Names*, IV, 12-14: PG 3, 709-713 calls God both *eros* and *agape*.

opening Israel's eyes to man's true nature and showing her the path leading to true humanism. It consists in the fact that man, through a life of fidelity to the one God, comes to experience himself as loved by God, and discovers joy in truth and in righteousness - a joy in God which becomes his essential happiness: "Whom do I have in heaven but you? And there is nothing upon earth that I desire besides you ... for me it is good to be near God" (*Ps* 73 [72]: 25, 28).

10. We have seen that God's *eros* for man is also totally *agape*. This is not only because it is bestowed in a completely gratuitous manner, without any previous merit, but also because it is love which forgives. Hosea above all shows us that this *agape* dimension of God's love for man goes far beyond the aspect of gratuity. Israel has committed "adultery" and has broken the covenant; God should judge and repudiate her. It is precisely at this point that God is revealed to be God and not man: "How can I give you up, O Ephraim! How can I hand you over, O Israel! ... My heart recoils within me, my compassion grows warm and tender. I will not execute my fierce anger, I will not again destroy Ephraim; for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst" (*Hos* 11:8-9). God's passionate love for his people - for humanity - is at the same time a forgiving love. It is so great that it turns God against himself, his love against his justice. Here Christians can see a dim prefigurement of the mystery of the Cross: so great is God's love for man that by becoming man he follows him even into death, and so reconciles justice and love.

The philosophical dimension to be noted in this biblical vision, and its importance from the standpoint of the history of religions, lies in the fact that on the one hand we find ourselves before a strictly metaphysical image of God: God is the absolute

and ultimate source of all being; but this universal principle of creation - the *Logos*, primordial reason - is at the same time a lover with all the passion of a true love. *Eros* is thus supremely ennobled, yet at the same time it is so purified as to become one with *agape*. We can thus see how the reception of the *Song of Songs* in the canon of sacred Scripture was soon explained by the idea that these love songs ultimately describe God's relation to man and man's relation to God. Thus the *Song of Songs* became, both in Christian and Jewish literature, a source of mystical knowledge and experience, an expression of the essence of biblical faith: that man can indeed enter into union with God - his primordial aspiration. But this union is no mere fusion, a sinking in the nameless ocean of the Divine; it is a unity which creates love, a unity in which both God and man remain themselves and yet become fully one. As Saint Paul says: "He who is united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him" (7 *Cor* 6:17).

11. The first novelty of biblical faith consists, as we have seen, in its image of God. The second, essentially connected to this, is found in the image of man. The biblical account of creation speaks of the solitude of Adam, the first man, and God's decision to give him a helper. Of all other creatures, not one is capable of being the helper that man needs, even though he has assigned a name to all the wild beasts and birds and thus made them fully a part of his life. So God forms woman from the rib of man. Now Adam finds the helper that he needed: "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh" (*Gen* 2:23). Here one might detect hints of ideas that are also found, for example, in the myth mentioned by Plato, according to which man was originally spherical, because he was complete in himself and self-sufficient. But as a punishment for pride, he was split in two by Zeus, so that now he longs for his

other half, striving with all his being to possess it and thus regain his integrity.<sup>8</sup> While the biblical narrative does not speak of punishment, the idea is certainly present that man is somehow incomplete, driven by nature to seek in another the part that can make him whole, the idea that only in communion with the opposite sex can he become "complete". The biblical account thus concludes with a prophecy about Adam: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife and they become one flesh" (*Gen 2:24*).

Two aspects of this are important. First, *eros* is somehow rooted in man's very nature; Adam is a seeker, who "abandons his mother and father" in order to find woman; only together do the two represent complete humanity and become "one flesh". The second aspect is equally important. From the standpoint of creation, *eros* directs man towards marriage, to a bond which is unique and definitive; thus, and only thus, does it fulfill its deepest purpose. Corresponding to the image of a monotheistic God is monogamous marriage. Marriage based on exclusive and definitive love becomes the icon of the relationship between God and his people and vice versa. God's way of loving becomes the measure of human love. This close connection between *eros* and marriage in the Bible has practically no equivalent in extra-biblical literature.

### *Jesus Christ - the Incarnate Love of God*

12. Though up to now we have been speaking mainly of the Old Testament, nevertheless the profound compenetration of the two Testaments as the one Scripture of the Christian faith has already become evident. The real novelty of the New Testament

<sup>x</sup> Plato. *Symposium*. XIV-XV, 189c-192d.

lies not so much in new ideas as in the figure of Christ himself, who gives flesh and blood to those concepts - an unprecedented realism. In the Old Testament, the novelty of the Bible did not consist merely in abstract notions but in God's unpredictable and in some sense unprecedented activity. This divine activity now takes on dramatic form when, in Jesus Christ, it is God himself who goes in search of the "stray sheep", a suffering and lost humanity. When Jesus speaks in his parables of the shepherd who goes after the lost sheep, of the woman who looks for the lost coin, of the father who goes to meet and embrace his prodigal son, these are no mere words: they constitute an explanation of his very being and activity. His death on the Cross is the culmination of that turning of God against himself in which he gives himself in order to raise man up and save him. This is love in its most radical form. By contemplating the pierced side of Christ (cf. 19:37), we can understand the starting-point of this Encyclical Letter: "God is love" (/ *Jn* 4:8). It is there that this truth can be contemplated. It is from there that our definition of love must begin. In this contemplation the Christian discovers the path along which his life and love must move.

13. Jesus gave this act of oblation an enduring presence through his institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. He anticipated his death and resurrection by giving his disciples, in the bread and wine, his very self, his body and blood as the new manna (cf. *Jn* 6:31-33). The ancient world had dimly perceived that man's real food - what truly nourishes him as man - is ultimately the *Logos*, eternal wisdom: this same *Logos* now truly becomes food for us - as love. The Eucharist draws us into Jesus' act of self-oblation. More than just statically receiving the incarnate *Logos*, we enter into the very dynamic of his self-giving. The

imagery of marriage between God and Israel is now realized in a way previously inconceivable: it had meant standing in God's presence, but now it becomes union with God through sharing in Jesus' self-gift, sharing in his body and blood. The sacramental "mysticism", grounded in God's condescension towards us, operates at a radically different level and lifts us to far greater heights than anything that any human mystical elevation could ever accomplish.

14. Here we need to consider yet another aspect: this sacramental "mysticism" is social in character, for in sacramental communion I become one with the Lord, like all the other communicants. As Saint Paul says, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (/ *Cor* 10:17). Union with Christ is also union with all those to whom he gives himself. I cannot possess Christ just for myself; I can belong to him only in union with all those who have become, or who will become, his own. Communion draws me out of myself towards him, and thus also towards unity with all Christians. We become "one body", completely joined in a single existence. Love of God and love of neighbour are now truly united: God incarnate draws us all to himself. We can thus understand how *agape* also became a term for the Eucharist: there God's own *agape* comes to us bodily, in order to continue his work in us and through us. Only by keeping in mind this Christological and sacramental basis can we correctly understand Jesus' teaching on love. The transition which he makes from the Law and the Prophets to the twofold commandment of love of God and of neighbour, and his grounding the whole life of faith on this central precept, is not simply a matter of morality - something that could exist apart from and alongside faith in Christ and its sacramental re-actualization. Faith, worship



and *ethos* are interwoven as a single reality which takes shape in our encounter with God's *agape*. Here the usual contraposition between worship and ethics simply falls apart. "Worship" itself, Eucharistic communion, includes the reality both of being loved and of loving others in turn. A Eucharist which does not pass over into the concrete practice of love is intrinsically fragmented. Conversely, as we shall have to consider in greater detail below, the "commandment" of love is only possible because it is more than a requirement. Love can be "commanded" because it has first been given.

15. This principle is the starting-point for understanding the great parables of Jesus. The rich man (cf. *Lk* 16:19-31) begs from his place of torment that his brothers be informed about what happens to those who simply ignore the poor man in need. Jesus takes up this cry for help as a warning to help us return to the right path. The parable of the Good Samaritan (cf. *Lk* 10:25-37) offers two particularly important clarifications. Until that time, the concept of "neighbour" was understood as referring essentially to one's countrymen and to foreigners who had settled in the land of Israel; in other words, to the closely-knit community of a single country or people. This limit is now abolished. Anyone who needs me, and whom I can help, is my neighbour. The concept of "neighbour" is now universalized, yet it remains concrete. Despite being extended to all mankind, it is not reduced to a generic, abstract and undemanding expression of love, but calls for my own practical commitment here and now. The Church has the duty to interpret ever anew this relationship between near and far with regard to the actual daily life of her members. Lastly, we should especially mention the great parable of the Last Judgment (cf. *Mt* 25:31-46), in which love becomes the criterion for the definitive

decision about a human life's worth or lack thereof. Jesus identifies himself with those in need, with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and those in prison. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt* 25:40). Love of God and love of neighbour have become one: in the least of the brethren we find Jesus himself, and in Jesus we find God.

### *Love of God and Love of Neighbour*

16. Having reflected on the nature of love and its meaning in biblical faith, we are left with two questions concerning our own attitude: can we love God without seeing him? And can love be commanded? Against the double commandment of love these questions raise a double objection. No one has ever seen God, so how could we love him? Moreover, love cannot be commanded; it is ultimately a feeling that is either there or not, nor can it be produced by the will. Scripture seems to reinforce the first objection when it states: "If anyone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (7 *Jn* 4:20). But this text hardly excludes the love of God as something impossible. On the contrary, the whole context of the passage quoted from the *First Letter of John* shows that such love is explicitly demanded. The unbreakable bond between love of God and love of neighbour is emphasized. One is so closely connected to the other that to say that we love God becomes a lie if we are closed to our neighbour or hate him altogether. Saint John's words should rather be interpreted to mean that love of neighbour is a path that leads to the encounter with God, and that closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God.

17. True, no one has ever seen God as he is. And yet God is not totally invisible to us; he does not remain completely inaccessible. God loved us first, says the *Letter of John* quoted above (cf. 4:10), and this love of God has appeared in our midst. He has become visible in as much as he "has sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him" (7 Jn 4:9). God has made himself visible: in Jesus we are able to see the Father (cf. Jn 14:9). Indeed, God is visible in a number of ways. In the love-story recounted by the Bible, he comes towards us, he seeks to win our hearts, all the way to the Last Supper, to the piercing of his heart on the Cross, to his appearances after the Resurrection and to the great deeds by which, through the activity of the Apostles, he guided the nascent Church along its path. Nor has the Lord been absent from subsequent Church history: he encounters us ever anew, in the men and women who reflect his presence, in his word, in the sacraments, and especially in the Eucharist. In the Church's Liturgy, in her prayer, in the living community of believers, we experience the love of God, we perceive his presence and we thus learn to recognize that presence in our daily lives. He has loved us first and he continues to do so; we too, then, can respond with love. God does not demand of us a feeling which we ourselves are incapable of producing. He loves us, he makes us see and experience his love, and since he has "loved us first", love can also blossom as a response within us.

In the gradual unfolding of this encounter, it is clearly revealed that love is not merely a sentiment. Sentiments come and go. A sentiment can be a marvelous first spark, but it is not the fullness of love. Earlier we spoke of the process of purification and maturation by which *eros* comes fully into its own, becomes love in the full meaning of the word. It is characteristic of mature love

that it calls into play all man's potentialities; it engages the whole man, so to speak. Contact with the visible manifestations of God's love can awaken within us a feeling of joy born of the experience of being loved. But this encounter also engages our will and our intellect. Acknowledgment of the living God is one path towards love, and the "yes" of our will to his will unites our intellect, will and sentiments in the all- embracing act of love. But this process is always open-ended; love is never "finished" and complete; throughout life, it changes and matures, and thus remains faithful to itself. *Idem velle atque idem nolle*<sup>9</sup> - to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing - was recognized by antiquity as the authentic content of love: the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the realization that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself.<sup>10</sup> Then self- abandonment to God increases and God becomes our joy (cf. *Ps* 73 [72]:23-28).

18. Love of neighbour is thus shown to be possible in the way proclaimed by the Bible, by Jesus. It consists in the very fact that, in God and with God, I love even the person whom I do not like or even know. This can only take place on the basis of an intimate encounter with God, an encounter which has become a communion of will, even affecting my feelings. Then I learn to

Sallust, *De coniuratione Catilinae*, XX, 4.

>Cf. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, III, 6. 11: CCL 27. 32.

look on this other person not simply with my eyes and my feelings, but from the perspective of Jesus Christ. His friend is my friend. Going beyond exterior appearances, I perceive in others an interior desire for a sign of love, of concern. This I can offer them not only through the organizations intended for such purposes, accepting it perhaps as a political necessity. Seeing with the eyes of Christ, I can give to others much more than their outward necessities; I can give them the look of love which they crave. Here we see the necessary interplay between love of God and love of neighbour which the *First Letter of John* speaks of with such insistence. If I have no contact whatsoever with God in my life, then I cannot see in the other anything more than the other, and I am incapable of seeing in him the image of God. But if in my life I fail completely to heed others, solely out of a desire to be "devout" and to perform my "religious duties", then my relationship with God will also grow arid. It becomes merely "proper", but loveless. Only my readiness to encounter my neighbour and to show him love makes me sensitive to God as well. Only if I serve my neighbour can my eyes be opened to what God does for me and how much he loves me. The saints - consider the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta - constantly renewed their capacity for love of neighbour from their encounter with the Eucharistic Lord, and conversely this encounter acquired its realism and depth in their service to others. Love of God and love of neighbour are thus inseparable, they form a single commandment. But both live from the love of God who has loved us first. No longer is it a question, then, of a "commandment" imposed from without and calling for the impossible, but rather of a freely-bestowed experience of love from within, a love which by its very nature must then be shared with others. Love grows through love. Love is "divine" because it comes

from God and unites us to God; through this unifying process it makes us a "we" which transcends our divisions and makes us one, until in the end God is "all in all" (*1 Cor 15:28*).

## **PART II**

### *CARITAS*

## **THE PRACTICE OF LOVE BY THE CHURCH AS A "COMMUNITY OF LOVE"**

### *The Church's Charitable Activity as a Manifestation of Trinitarian Love*

19. "If you see charity, you see the Trinity", wrote Saint Augustine.<sup>11</sup> In the foregoing reflections, we have been able to focus our attention on the Pierced one (cf. *Jn 19:37, Zech 12:10*), recognizing the plan of the Father who, moved by love (cf. *Jn 3:16*), sent his only-begotten Son into the world to redeem man. By dying on the Cross - as Saint John tells us - Jesus "gave up his Spirit" (*Jn 19:30*), anticipating the gift of the Holy Spirit that he would make after his Resurrection (cf. *Jn 20:22*). This was to fulfill the promise of "rivers of living water" that would flow out of the hearts of believers, through the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. *Jn 7:38-39*). The Spirit, in fact, is that interior power which harmonizes their hearts with Christ's heart and moves them to love their brethren as Christ loved them, when he bent down to wash the feet of the disciples (cf. *Jn 13:1-13*) and above all when he gave his life for us (cf. *Jn 13:1, 15:13*).

*De Trinitate.* VIII, 8, 12: CCL 50. 287.

The Spirit is also the energy which transforms the heart of the ecclesial community, so that it becomes a witness before the world to the love of the Father, who wishes to make humanity a single family in his Son. The entire activity of the Church is an expression of a love that seeks the integral good of man: it seeks his evangelization through Word and Sacrament, an undertaking that is often heroic in the way it is acted out in history; and it seeks to promote man in the various arenas of life and human activity. Love is therefore the service that the Church carries out in order to attend constantly to man's sufferings and his needs, including material needs. And this is the aspect, this *service of charity*, on which I want to focus in the second part of the Encyclical.

### ***Charity as a Responsibility of the Church***

20. Love of neighbour, grounded in the love of God, is first and foremost a responsibility for each individual member of the faithful, but it is also a responsibility for the entire ecclesial community at every level: from the local community to the particular Church and to the Church universal in its entirety. As a community, the Church must practise love. Love thus needs to be organized if it is to be an ordered service to the community. The awareness of this responsibility has had a constitutive relevance in the Church from the beginning: "All who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need" (*Acts* 2:44-5). In these words, Saint Luke provides a kind of definition of the Church, whose constitutive elements include fidelity to the "teaching of the Apostles", "communion" (*koinonia*), "the breaking of the bread" and "prayer" (cf. *Acts* 2:42). The element of "communion" (*koinonia*) is not initially defined, but appears concretely in the verses quoted above: it consists in the fact that

believers hold all things in common and that among them, there is no longer any distinction between rich and poor (cf. also *Acts* 4:32-37). As the Church grew, this radical form of material communion could not in fact be preserved. But its essential core remained: within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life.

21. A decisive step in the difficult search for ways of putting this fundamental ecclesial principle into practice is illustrated in the choice of the seven, which marked the origin of the diaconal office (cf. *Acts* 6:5-6). In the early Church, in fact, with regard to the daily distribution to widows, a disparity had arisen between Hebrew speakers and Greek speakers. The Apostles, who had been entrusted primarily with "prayer" (the Eucharist and the liturgy) and the "ministry of the word", felt over-burdened by "serving tables", so they decided to reserve to themselves the principal duty and to designate for the other task, also necessary in the Church, a group of seven persons. Nor was this group to carry out a purely mechanical work of distribution: they were to be men "full of the Spirit and of wisdom" (cf. *Acts* 6:1-6). In other words, the social service which they were meant to provide was absolutely concrete, yet at the same time it was also a spiritual service; theirs was a truly spiritual office which carried out an essential responsibility of the Church, namely a well-ordered love of neighbour. With the formation of this group of seven, "*diaconia*" - the ministry of charity exercised in a communitarian, orderly way - became part of the fundamental structure of the Church.

22. As the years went by and the Church spread further afield, the exercise of charity became established as one of her essential activities, along with the administration of the sacraments and the



proclamation of the word: love for widows and orphans, prisoners, and the sick and needy of every kind, is as essential to **her** as **the** ministry of the sacraments and preaching of the Gospel. **The** Church cannot neglect the service of charity any **more than** she can neglect the Sacraments and the Word. A few references **will** suffice to demonstrate this. Justin Martyr (t c. 155) in speaking of the Christians' celebration of Sunday, also mentions their charitable activity, linked with the Eucharist as such. Those who are able make offerings in accordance with their means, each as he or she wishes; the Bishop in turn makes use of these to support orphans, widows, the sick and those who for other reasons find themselves in need, such as prisoners and foreigners.<sup>12</sup> The great Christian writer Tertullian (f after 220) relates how the pagans were struck by the Christians' concern for the needy of every sort.<sup>13</sup> And when Ignatius of Antioch (t c. 117) described the Church of Rome as "presiding in charity (*agape*)",<sup>14</sup> we may assume that with this definition he also intended in some sense to express her concrete charitable activity.

23. Here it might be helpful to allude to the earliest legal structures associated with the service of charity in the Church. Towards the middle of the fourth century we see the development in Egypt of the "*diaconia*": the institution within each monastery responsible for all works of relief, that is to say, for the service of charity. By the sixth century this institution had evolved into a corporation with full juridical standing, which the civil authorities themselves entrusted with part of the grain for public distribution.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. / *Apologia*, 67: PG 6, 429.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Apologeticum*, 39, 7: PL 1, 468.

<sup>4</sup> *Ep. ad Rom., Inscr*: PG 5, 801.

In Egypt not only each monastery, but each individual Diocese eventually had its own *diaconia*; this institution then developed in both East and West. Pope Gregory the Great (f 604) mentions the *diaconia* of Naples, while in Rome the *diaconiae* are documented from the seventh and eighth centuries. But charitable activity on behalf of the poor and suffering was naturally an essential part of the Church of Rome from the very beginning, based on the principles of Christian life given in the *Acts of the Apostles*. It found a vivid expression in the case of the deacon Lawrence (t 258). The dramatic description of Lawrence's martyrdom was known to Saint Ambrose (t 397) and it provides a fundamentally authentic picture of the saint. As the one responsible for the care of the poor in Rome, Lawrence had been given a period of time, after the capture of the Pope and of Lawrence's fellow deacons, to collect the treasures of the Church and hand them over to the civil authorities. He distributed to the poor whatever funds were available and then presented to the authorities the poor themselves as the real treasure of the Church.<sup>15</sup> Whatever historical reliability one attributes to these details, Lawrence has always remained present in the Church's memory as a great exponent of ecclesial charity.

24. A mention of the emperor Julian the Apostate (t 363) can also show how essential the early Church considered the organized practice of charity. As a child of six years, Julian witnessed the assassination of his father, brother and other family members by the guards of the imperial palace; rightly or wrongly, he blamed this brutal act on the Emperor Constantius, who passed himself off as an outstanding Christian. The Christian faith was thus

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Saint Ambrose. *De officiis ministrorum*, II. 28, 140: PL 16. 141.

definitively discredited in his eyes. Upon becoming emperor, Julian decided to restore paganism, the ancient Roman religion, while reforming it in the hope of making it the driving force behind the empire. In this project he was amply inspired by Christianity. He established a hierarchy of metropolitans and priests who were to foster love of God and neighbour. In one of his letters,<sup>16</sup> he wrote that the sole aspect of Christianity which had impressed him was the Church's charitable activity. He thus considered it essential for his new pagan religion that, alongside the system of the Church's charity, an equivalent activity of its own be established. According to him, this was the reason for the popularity of the "Galileans". They needed now to be imitated and outdone. In this way, then, the Emperor confirmed that charity was a decisive feature of the Christian community, the Church.

25. Thus far, two essential facts have emerged from our reflections:

a) The Church's deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (*kerygma-martyria*), celebrating the sacraments (*leitourgia*), and exercising the ministry of charity (*diakonia*). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable. For the Church, charity is not a kind of welfare activity which could equally well be left to others, but is a part of her nature, an indispensable expression of her very being.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Ep. 83: J. Bidez, L'Empereur Julien. (Euvres completes, Paris 19602, v. I, 2a, p. 145.*

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Congregation for Bishops, *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 194, Vatican City 2004, p. 213.

b) The Church is God's family in the world. In this family no one ought to go without the necessities of life. Yet at the same time *caritas* - *agape* extends beyond the frontiers of the Church. The parable of the Good Samaritan remains as a standard which imposes universal love towards the needy whom we encounter "by chance" (cf. *Lk* 10:31), whoever they may be. Without in any way detracting from this commandment of universal love, the Church also has a specific responsibility: within the ecclesial family no member should suffer through being in need. The teaching of the *Letter to the Galatians* is emphatic: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, and especially to those who are of the household of faith" (6:10).

### *Justice and Charity*

26. Since the nineteenth century, an objection has been raised to the Church's charitable activity, subsequently developed with particular insistence by Marxism: the poor, it is claimed, do not need charity but justice. Works of charity - almsgiving - are in effect a way for the rich to shirk their obligation to work for justice and a means of soothing their consciences, while preserving their own status and robbing the poor of their rights. Instead of contributing through individual works of charity to maintaining the *status quo*, we need to build a just social order in which all receive their share of the world's goods and no longer have to depend on charity. There is admittedly some truth to this argument, but also much that is mistaken. It is true that the pursuit of justice must be a fundamental norm of the State and that the aim of a just social order is to guarantee to each person, according to the principle of subsidiarity, his share of the community's goods. This has always been emphasized by Christian teaching on the State

and by the Church's social doctrine. Historically, the issue of the just ordering of the collectivity had taken a new dimension with the industrialization of society in the nineteenth century. The rise of modern industry caused the old social structures to collapse, while the growth of a class of salaried workers provoked radical changes in the fabric of society. The relationship between capital and labour now became the decisive issue - an issue which in that form was previously unknown. Capital and the means of production were now the new source of power which, concentrated in the hands of a few, led to the suppression of the rights of the working classes, against which they had to rebel.

27. It must be admitted that the Church's leadership was slow to realize that the issue of the just structuring of society needed to be approached in a new way. There were some pioneers, such as Bishop Ketteler of Mainz (t 1877), and concrete needs were met by a growing number of groups, associations, leagues, federations and, in particular, by the new religious orders founded in the nineteenth century to combat poverty, disease and the need for better education. In 1891, the papal magisterium intervened with the Encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Leo XIII. This was followed in 1931 by Pius XI's Encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*. In 1961 Blessed John XXIII published the Encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, while Paul VI, in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio* (1967) and in the Apostolic Letter *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), insistently addressed the social problem, which had meanwhile become especially acute in Latin America. My great predecessor John Paul II left us a trilogy of social Encyclicals: *Laborem Exercens* (1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (1987) and finally *Centesimus Annus* (1991). Faced with new situations and issues, Catholic social teaching thus gradually developed, and has now found a

comprehensive presentation in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* published in 2004 by the Pontifical Council *Iustitia et Pax*. Marxism had seen world revolution and its preliminaries as the panacea for the social problem: revolution and the subsequent collectivization of the means of production, so it was claimed, would immediately change things for the better. This illusion has vanished. In today's complex situation, not least because of the growth of a globalized economy, the Church's social doctrine has become a set of fundamental guidelines offering approaches that are valid even beyond the confines of the Church: in the face of ongoing development these guidelines need to be addressed in the context of dialogue with all those seriously concerned for humanity and for the world in which we live.

28. In order to define more accurately the relationship between the necessary commitment to justice and the ministry of charity, two fundamental situations need to be considered:

a) The just ordering of society and the State is a central responsibility of politics. As Augustine once said, a State which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves: "*Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia ?*".' Fundamental to Christianity is the distinction between what belongs to Caesar and what belongs to God (cf. *Mt* 22:21), in other words, the distinction between Church and State, or, as the Second Vatican Council puts it, the autonomy of the temporal sphere.<sup>19</sup> The State may not impose religion, yet it must guarantee religious freedom and harmony between the followers of different

<sup>18</sup> *De Civitate Dei*, **TV. 4: CCL 47, 102.**

<sup>19</sup> Cf. **Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World** *Gaudium et Spes*, **36.**

religions. For her part, the Church, as the social expression of Christian faith, has a proper independence and is structured on the basis of her faith as a community which the State must recognize. The two spheres are distinct, yet always interrelated.

Justice is both the aim and the intrinsic criterion of all politics. Politics is more than a mere mechanism for defining the rules of public life: its origin and its goal are found in justice, which by its very nature has to do with ethics. The State must inevitably face the question of how justice can be achieved here and now. But this presupposes an even more radical question: what is justice? The problem is one of practical reason; but if reason is to be exercised properly, it must undergo constant purification, since it can never be completely free of the danger of a certain ethical blindness caused by the dazzling effect of power and special interests.

Here politics and faith meet. Faith by its specific nature is an encounter with the living God - an encounter opening up new horizons extending beyond the sphere of reason. But it is also a purifying force for reason itself. From God's standpoint, faith liberates reason from its blind spots and therefore helps it to be ever more fully itself. Faith enables reason to do its work more effectively and to see its proper object more clearly. This is where Catholic social doctrine has its place: it has no intention of giving the Church power over the State. Even less is it an attempt to impose on those who do not share the faith ways of thinking and modes of conduct proper to faith. Its aim is simply to help purify reason and to contribute, here and now, to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just.

The Church's social teaching argues on the basis of reason and natural law, namely, on the basis of what is in accord with the

nature of every human being. It recognizes that it is not the Church's responsibility to make this teaching prevail in political life. Rather, the Church wishes to help form consciences in political life and to stimulate greater insight into the authentic requirements of justice as well as greater readiness to act accordingly, even when this might involve conflict with situations of personal interest. Building a just social and civil order, wherein each person receives what is his or her due, is an essential task which every generation must take up anew. As a political task, this cannot be the Church's immediate responsibility. Yet, since it is also a most important human responsibility, the Church is duty-bound to offer, through the purification of reason and through ethical formation, her own specific contribution towards understanding the requirements of justice and achieving them politically.

The Church cannot and must not take upon herself the political battle to bring about the most just society possible. She cannot and must not replace the State. Yet at the same time she cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice. She has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice, which always demands sacrifice, cannot prevail and prosper. A just society must be the achievement of politics, not of the Church. Yet the promotion of justice through efforts to bring about openness of mind and will to the demands of the common good is something which concerns the Church deeply.

b) Love - *caritas* - will always prove necessary, even in the most just society. There is no ordering of the State so just that it can eliminate the need for a service of love. Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help. There



will always be loneliness. There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable.<sup>20</sup> The State which would provide everything, absorbing everything into itself, would ultimately become a mere bureaucracy incapable of guaranteeing the very thing which the suffering person - every person - needs: namely, loving personal concern. We do not need a State which regulates and controls everything, but a State which, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, generously acknowledges and supports initiatives arising from the different social forces and combines spontaneity with closeness to those in need. The Church is one of those living forces: she is alive with the love enkindled by the Spirit of Christ. This love does not simply offer people material help, but refreshment and care for their souls, something which often is even more necessary than material support. In the end, the claim that just social structures would make works of charity superfluous masks a materialist conception of man: the mistaken notion that man can live "by bread alone" (*Mt* 4:4; cf. *Dt* 8:3) - a conviction that demeans man and ultimately disregards all that is specifically human.

29. We can now determine more precisely, in the life of the Church, the relationship between commitment to the just ordering of the State and society on the one hand, and organized charitable activity on the other. We have seen that the formation of just structures is not directly the duty of the Church, but belongs to the world of politics, the sphere of the autonomous use of reason. The Church has an indirect duty here, in that she is called to contribute

- Cf. Congregation for Bishops. Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004). 197, Vatican City 2004. p. 217.

to the purification of reason and to the reawakening of those moral forces without which just structures are neither established nor prove effective in the long run.

The direct duty to work for a just ordering of society, on the other hand, is proper to the lay faithful. As citizens of the State, they are called to take part in public life in a personal capacity. So they cannot relinquish their participation "in the many different economic, social, legislative, administrative and cultural areas, which are intended to promote organically and institutionally the *common good*."<sup>21</sup> The mission of the lay faithful is therefore to configure social life correctly, respecting its legitimate autonomy and cooperating with other citizens according to their respective competences and fulfilling their own responsibility.<sup>22</sup> Even if the specific expressions of ecclesial charity can never be confused with the activity of the State, it still remains true that charity must animate the entire lives of the lay faithful and therefore also their political activity, lived as "social charity".<sup>23</sup>

The Church's charitable organizations, on the other hand, constitute an *opus proprium*, a task agreeable to her, in which she does not cooperate collaterally, but acts as a subject with direct responsibility, doing what corresponds to her nature. The Church can never be exempted from practising charity as an organized activity of believers, and on the other hand, there will never be a

John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laid* (30 December 1988). 42: AAS 81 (1989), 472.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Doctrinal Note on Some Questions Regarding the Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (24 November 2002), 1: *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 22 January 2003. p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1939.

situation where the charity of each individual Christian is unnecessary, because in addition to justice man needs, and will always need, love.

### ***The Multiple Structures of Charitable Service in the Social Context of the Present Day***

30. Before attempting to define the specific profile of the Church's activities in the service of man, I now wish to consider the overall situation of the struggle for justice and love in the world of today.

a) Today the means of mass communication have made our planet smaller, rapidly narrowing the distance between different peoples and cultures. This "togetherness" at times gives rise to misunderstandings and tensions, yet our ability to know almost instantly about the needs of others challenges us to share their situation and their difficulties. Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world on account of different kinds of poverty, both material and spiritual. Our times call for a new readiness to assist our neighbours in need. The Second Vatican Council had made this point very clearly: "Now that, through better means of communication, distances between peoples have been almost eliminated, charitable activity can and should embrace all people and all needs."<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand - and here we see one of the challenging yet also positive sides of the process of globalization - we now have at our disposal numerous means for offering humanitarian

<sup>-4</sup> Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 8.

assistance to our brothers and sisters in need, not least modern systems of distributing food and clothing, and of providing housing and care. Concern for our neighbour transcends the confines of national communities and has increasingly broadened its horizon to the whole world. The Second Vatican Council rightly observed that "among the signs of our times, one particularly worthy of note is a growing, inescapable sense of solidarity between all peoples."<sup>25</sup> State agencies and humanitarian associations work to promote this, the former mainly through subsidies or tax relief, the latter by making available considerable resources. The solidarity shown by civil society thus significantly surpasses that shown by individuals.

b) This situation has led to the birth and the growth of many forms of cooperation between State and Church agencies, which have borne fruit. Church agencies, with their transparent operation and their faithfulness to the duty of witnessing to love, are able to give a Christian quality to the civil agencies too, favouring a mutual coordination that can only redound to the effectiveness of charitable service.<sup>26</sup> Numerous organizations for charitable or philanthropic purposes have also been established and these are committed to achieving adequate humanitarian solutions to the social and political problems of the day. Significantly, our time has also seen the growth and spread of different kinds of volunteer work, which assume responsibility for providing a variety of services.<sup>27</sup> I wish

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Congregation for Bishops, *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 195. Vatican City 2004, pp. 214-216.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. John Paul II. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988). 41: AAS 81 (1989). 470-472.

here to offer a special word of gratitude and appreciation to all those who take part in these activities in whatever way. For young people, this widespread involvement constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and in readiness to offer others not simply material aid but their very selves. The anti-culture of death, which finds expression for example in drug use, is thus countered by an unselfish love which shows itself to be a culture of life by the very willingness to "lose itself (cf. *Lk 17:33 et passim*) for others.

In the Catholic Church, and also in the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities, new forms of charitable activity have arisen, while other, older ones have taken on new life and energy. In these new forms, it is often possible to establish a fruitful link between evangelization and works of charity. Here I would clearly reaffirm what my great predecessor John Paul II wrote in his Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*<sup>28</sup> when he asserted the readiness of the Catholic Church to cooperate with the charitable agencies of these Churches and Communities, since we all have the same fundamental motivation and look towards the same goal: a true humanism, which acknowledges that man is made in the image of God and wants to help him to live in a way consonant with that dignity. His Encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* emphasized that the building of a better world requires Christians to speak with a united voice in working to inculcate "respect for the rights and needs of everyone, especially the poor, the lowly and the defenceless."<sup>29</sup> Here I would like to express my satisfaction that this appeal has found a wide resonance in numerous initiatives throughout the world.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. No. 32: AAS 80 (1988). 556.

<sup>24</sup> No. 43: AAS 87 (1995). 946.

## *The Distinctiveness of the Church's Charitable Activity*

31. The increase in diversified organizations engaged in meeting various human needs is ultimately due to the fact that the command of love of neighbour is inscribed by the Creator in man's very nature. It is also a result of the presence of Christianity in the world, since Christianity constantly revives and acts out this imperative, so often profoundly obscured in the course of time. The reform of paganism attempted by the emperor Julian the Apostate is only an initial example of this effect; here we see how the power of Christianity spread well beyond the frontiers of the Christian faith. For this reason, it is very important that the Church's charitable activity maintains all of its splendour and does not become just another form of social assistance. So what are the essential elements of Christian and ecclesial charity?

a) Following the example given in the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christian charity is first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc. The Church's charitable organizations, beginning with those of *Caritas* (at diocesan, national and international levels), ought to do everything in their power to provide the resources and above all the personnel needed for this work. Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what to do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care. Yet, while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern. Those who work for the Church's charitable organizations must be distinguished

by the fact that they do not merely meet the needs of the moment, but they dedicate themselves to others with heartfelt concern, enabling them to experience the richness of their humanity. Consequently, in addition to their necessary professional training, these charity workers need a "formation of the heart": they need to be led to that encounter with God in Christ which awakens their love and opens their spirits to others. As a result, love of neighbour will no longer be for them a commandment imposed, so to speak, from without, but a consequence deriving from their faith, a faith which becomes active through love (cf. *Gal 5:6*).

b) Christian charitable activity must be independent of parties and ideologies. It is not a means of changing the world ideologically, and it is not at the service of worldly stratagems, but it is a way of making present here and now the love which man always needs. The modern age, particularly from the nineteenth century on, has been dominated by various versions of a philosophy of progress whose most radical form is Marxism. Part of Marxist strategy is the theory of impoverishment: in a situation of unjust power, it is claimed, anyone who engages in charitable initiatives is actually serving that unjust system, making it appear at least to some extent tolerable. This in turn slows down a potential revolution and thus blocks the struggle for a better world. Seen in this way, charity is rejected and attacked as a means of preserving the *status quo*. What we have here, though, is really an inhuman philosophy. People of the present are sacrificed to the *moloch* of the future - a future whose effective realization is at best doubtful. One does not make the world more human by refusing to act humanely here and now. We contribute to a better world only by personally doing good now, with full commitment and wherever we have the opportunity, independently of partisan strategies and programmes. The Christian's programme - the

programme of the Good Samaritan, the programme of Jesus - is "a heart which sees". This heart sees where love is needed and acts accordingly. Obviously when charitable activity is carried out by the Church as a communitarian initiative, the spontaneity of individuals must be combined with planning, foresight and cooperation with other similar institutions.

c) Charity, furthermore, cannot be used as a means of engaging in what is nowadays considered proselytism. Love is free; it is not practised as a way of achieving other ends.<sup>30</sup> But this does not mean that charitable activity must somehow leave God and Christ aside. For it is always concerned with the whole man. Often the deepest cause of suffering is the very absence of God. Those who practise charity in the Church's name will never seek to impose the Church's faith upon others. They realize that a pure and generous love is the best witness to the God in whom we believe and by whom we are driven to love. A Christian knows when it is time to speak of God and when it is better to say nothing and to let love alone speak. He knows that God is love (cf. *1 Jn* 4:8) and that God's presence is felt at the very time when the only thing we do is to love. He knows - to return to the questions raised earlier - that disdain for love is disdain for God and man alike; it is an attempt to do without God. Consequently, the best defence of God and man consists precisely in love. It is the responsibility of the Church's charitable organizations to reinforce this awareness in their members, so that by their activity - as well as their words, their silence, their example - they may be credible witnesses to Christ.

- Cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successores* (22 February 2004), 196, Vatican City 2004, p. 216.



### ***Those Responsible for the Church's Charitable Activity***

32. Finally, we must turn our attention once again to those who are responsible for carrying out the Church's charitable activity. As our preceding reflections have made clear, the true subject of the various Catholic organizations that carry out a ministry of charity is the Church herself - at all levels, from the parishes, through the particular Churches, to the universal Church. For this reason it was most opportune that my venerable predecessor Paul VI established the Pontifical Council *Cor Unum* as the agency of the Holy See responsible for orienting and coordinating the organizations and charitable activities promoted by the Catholic Church. In conformity with the episcopal structure of the Church, the Bishops, as successors of the Apostles, are charged with primary responsibility for carrying out in the particular Churches the programme set forth in the *Acts of the Apostles* (cf. 2:42-44): today as in the past, the Church as God's family must be a place where help is given and received, and at the same time, a place where people are also prepared to serve those outside her confines who are in need of help. In the rite of episcopal ordination, prior to the act of consecration itself, the candidate must respond to several questions which express the essential elements of his office and recall the duties of his future ministry. He promises expressly to be, in the Lord's name, welcoming and merciful to the poor and to all those in need of consolation and assistance.<sup>31</sup> The *Code of Canon Law*, in the canons on the ministry of the Bishop, does not expressly mention charity as a specific sector of episcopal activity, but speaks in general terms of the Bishop's responsibility for coordinating the

Cf. **Pontificate Romanum**, *De ordinatione episcopi*, 43.

different works of the apostolate with due regard for their proper character.<sup>32</sup> Recently, however, the *Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops* explored more specifically the duty of charity as a responsibility incumbent upon the whole Church and upon each Bishop in his Diocese,<sup>33</sup> and it emphasized that the exercise of charity is an action of the Church as such, and that, like the ministry of Word and Sacrament, it too has been an essential part of her mission from the very beginning.<sup>34</sup>

33. With regard to the personnel who carry out the Church's charitable activity on the practical level, the essential has already been said: they must not be inspired by ideologies aimed at improving the world, but should rather be guided by the faith which works through love (cf. *Gal* 5:6). Consequently, more than anything, they must be persons moved by Christ's love, persons whose hearts Christ has conquered with his love, awakening within them a love of neighbour. The criterion inspiring their activity should be Saint Paul's statement in the *Second Letter to the Corinthians*: "the love of Christ urges us on" (5:14). The consciousness that, in Christ, God has given himself for us, even unto death, must inspire us to live no longer for ourselves but for him, and, with him, for others. Whoever loves Christ loves the Church, and desires the Church to be increasingly the image and instrument of the love which flows from Christ. The personnel of every Catholic charitable organization want to work with the Church and therefore with the Bishop, so that the love of God can spread throughout the world. By their sharing in the Church's

<sup>3</sup>- Cf. can. 394; *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches*, can. 203.

"Cf. Nos. 193-198: pp. 212-219.

<sup>^</sup> *Ibid.*, 194: pp. 213-214.

practice of love, they wish to be witnesses of God and of Christ, and they wish for this very reason freely to do good to all.

34. Interior openness to the Catholic dimension of the Church cannot fail to dispose charity workers to work in harmony with other organizations in serving various forms of need, but in a way that respects what is distinctive about the service which Christ requested of his disciples. Saint Paul, in his hymn to charity (cf. *1 Cor* 13), teaches us that it is always more than activity alone: "If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, I gain nothing" (v. 3). This hymn must be the *Magna Carta* of all ecclesial service; it sums up all the reflections on love which I have offered throughout this Encyclical Letter. Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ. My deep personal sharing in the needs and sufferings of others becomes a sharing of my very self with them: if my gift is not to prove a source of humiliation, I must give to others not only something that is my own, but my very self; I must be personally present in my gift.

35. This proper way of serving others also leads to humility. The one who serves does not consider himself superior to the one served, however miserable his situation at the moment may be. Christ took the lowest place in the world - the Cross - and by this radical humility he redeemed us and constantly comes to our aid. Those who are in a position to help others will realize that in doing so they themselves receive help; being able to help others is no merit or achievement of their own. This duty is a grace. The more we do for others, the more we understand and can appropriate the words of Christ: "We are useless servants" (*Lk* 17:10). We

recognize that we are not acting on the basis of any superiority or greater personal efficiency, but because the Lord has graciously enabled us to do so. There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged. But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands; and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of Jesus Christ always at work: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14).

36. When we consider the immensity of others' needs, we can, on the one hand, be driven towards an ideology that would aim at doing what God's governance of the world apparently cannot: fully resolving every problem. Or we can be tempted to give in to inertia, since it would seem that in any event nothing can be accomplished. At such times, a living relationship with Christ is decisive if we are to keep on the right path, without falling into an arrogant contempt for man, something not only unconstructive but actually destructive, or surrendering to a resignation which would prevent us from being guided by love in the service of others. Prayer, as a means of drawing ever new strength from Christ, is concretely and urgently needed. People who pray are not wasting their time, even though the situation appears desperate and seems to call for action alone. Piety does not undermine the struggle against the poverty of our neighbours,

however extreme. In the example of Blessed Teresa of Calcutta we have a clear illustration of the fact that time devoted to God in prayer not only does not detract from effective and loving service to our neighbour but is in fact the inexhaustible source of that service. In her letter for Lent 1996, Blessed Teresa wrote to her lay co-workers: "We need this deep connection with God in our daily life. How can we obtain it? By prayer".

37. It is time to reaffirm the importance of prayer in the face of the activism and the growing secularism of many Christians engaged in charitable work. Clearly, the Christian who prays does not claim to be able to change God's plans or correct what he has foreseen. Rather, he seeks an encounter with the Father of Jesus Christ, asking God to be present with the consolation of the Spirit to him and his work. A personal relationship with God and an abandonment to his will can prevent man from being demeaned and save him from falling prey to the teaching of fanaticism and terrorism. An authentically religious attitude prevents man from presuming to judge God, accusing him of allowing poverty and failing to have compassion for his creatures. When people claim to build a case against God in defence of man, on whom can they depend when human activity proves powerless?

38. Certainly Job could complain before God about the presence of incomprehensible and apparently unjustified suffering in the world. In his pain he cried out: "Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! ... I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? ... Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him. God has made my heart faint; the Almighty has

terrified me" (23:3, 5-6, 15-16). Often we cannot understand why God refrains from intervening. Yet he does not prevent us from crying out, like Jesus on the Cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (*Mt* 27:46). We should continue asking this question in prayerful dialogue before his face: "Lord, holy and true, how long will it be?" (*Rev* 6:10). It is Saint Augustine who gives us faith's answer to our sufferings: "*Si comprehendis, non est Deus* " - "if you understand him, he is not God."<sup>35</sup> Our protest is not meant to challenge God, or to suggest that error, weakness or indifference can be found in him. For the believer, it is impossible to imagine that God is powerless or that "perhaps he is asleep" (cf. *1 Kg* 18:27). Instead, our crying out is, as it was for Jesus on the Cross, the deepest and most radical way of affirming our faith in his sovereign power. Even in their bewilderment and failure to understand the world around them, Christians continue to believe in the "goodness and loving kindness of God" (*Tit* 3:4). Immersed like everyone else in the dramatic complexity of historical events, they remain unshakably certain that God is our Father and loves us, even when his silence remains incomprehensible.

39. Faith, hope and charity go together. Hope is practised through the virtue of patience, which continues to do good even in the face of apparent failure, and through the virtue of humility, which accepts God's mystery and trusts him even at times of darkness. Faith tells us that God has given his Son for our sakes and gives us the victorious certainty that it is really true: God is love! It thus transforms our impatience and our doubts into the sure hope that God holds the world in his hands and that, as the

<sup>35</sup> *Sermo* 52. 16: PL 38. 360.

dramatic imagery of the end of the Book of Revelation points out, in spite of all darkness he ultimately triumphs in glory. Faith, which sees the love of God revealed in the pierced heart of Jesus on the Cross, gives rise to love. Love is the light - and in the end, the only light - that can always illuminate a world grown dim and give us the courage needed to keep living and working. Love is possible, and we are able to practise it because we are created in the image of God. To experience love and in this way to cause the light of God to enter into the world - this is the invitation I would like to extend with the present Encyclical.

## CONCLUSION

40. Finally, let us consider the saints, who exercised charity in an exemplary way. Our thoughts turn especially to Martin of Tours (f 397), the soldier who became a monk and a bishop: he is almost like an icon, illustrating the irreplaceable value of the individual testimony to charity. At the gates of Amiens, Martin gave half of his cloak to a poor man: Jesus himself, that night, appeared to him in a dream wearing that cloak, confirming the permanent validity of the Gospel saying: "I was naked and you clothed me ... as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (*Mt* 25:36, 40).<sup>36</sup> Yet in the history of the Church, how many other testimonies to charity could be quoted! In particular, the entire monastic movement, from its origins with Saint Anthony the Abbot (f 356), expresses an immense service of charity towards neighbour. In his encounter "face to face" with the God who is Love, the monk senses the impelling need to transform his

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Sulpicius Severus. *Vita Sancti Martini*, 3, 1-3: SCh 133. 256-258.

whole life into service of neighbour, in addition to service of God. This explains the great emphasis on hospitality, refuge and care of the infirm in the vicinity of the monasteries. It also explains the immense initiatives of human welfare and Christian formation, aimed above all at the very poor, who became the object of care firstly for the monastic and mendicant orders, and later for the various male and female religious institutes all through the history of the Church. The figures of saints such as Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, John of God, Camillus of Lellis, Vincent de Paul, Louise de Marillac, Giuseppe B. Cottolengo, John Bosco, Luigi Orione, Teresa of Calcutta to name but a few - stand out as lasting models of social charity for all people of good will. The saints are the true bearers of light within history, for they are men and women of faith, hope and love.

41. Outstanding among the saints is Mary, Mother of the Lord and mirror of all holiness. In the *Gospel of Luke* we find her engaged in a service of charity to her cousin Elizabeth, with whom she remained for "about three months" (1:56) so as to assist her in the final phase of her pregnancy. "*Magnificat anima mea Dominum*", she says on the occasion of that visit, "My soul magnifies the Lord" (*Lk* 1:46). In these words she expresses her whole programme of life: not setting herself at the centre, but leaving space for God, who is encountered both in prayer and in service of neighbour - only then does goodness enter the world. Mary's greatness consists in the fact that she wants to magnify God, not herself. She is lowly: her only desire is to be the handmaid of the Lord (cf. *Lk* 1:38, 48). She knows that she will only contribute to the salvation of the world if, rather than carrying



out her own projects, she places herself completely at the disposal of God's initiatives. Mary is a woman of hope: only because she believes in God's promises and awaits the salvation of Israel, can the angel visit her and call her to the decisive service of these promises. Mary is a woman of faith: "Blessed are you who believed", Elizabeth says to her (cf. *Lk* 1:45). The *Magnificat* - a portrait, so to speak, of her soul - is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God. Here we see how her thoughts are attuned to the thoughts of God, how her will is one with the will of God. Since Mary is completely imbued with the Word of God, she is able to become the Mother of the Word Incarnate. Finally, Mary is a woman who loves. How could it be otherwise? As a believer who in faith thinks with God's thoughts and wills with God's will, she cannot fail to be a woman who loves. We sense this in her quiet gestures, as recounted by the infancy narratives in the Gospel. We see it in the delicacy with which she recognizes the need of the spouses at Cana and makes it known to Jesus. We see it in the humility with which she recedes into the background during Jesus' public life, knowing that the Son must establish a new family and that the Mother's hour will come only with the Cross, which will be Jesus' true hour (cf. *Jn* 2:4; 13:1). When the disciples flee, Mary will remain beneath the Cross (cf. *Jn* 19:25-27); later, at the hour of Pentecost, it will be they who gather around her as they wait for the Holy Spirit (cf. *Acts* 1:14).

42. The lives of the saints are not **limited to** their earthly biographies but also include their being and working in God after death. In the saints one thing becomes clear: those who draw near to God do not withdraw from men, but rather become truly close to them. In no one do we see this more clearly than in Mary. The words addressed by the crucified Lord to his disciple - to John and through him to all disciples of Jesus: "Behold, your mother!" (*Jn* 19:27) - are fulfilled anew in every generation. Mary has truly become the Mother of all believers. Men and women of every time and place have recourse to her motherly kindness and her virginal purity and grace, in all their needs and aspirations, their joys and sorrows, their moments of loneliness and their common endeavours. They constantly experience the gift of her goodness and the unfailing love which she pours out from the depths of her heart. The testimonials of gratitude, offered to her from every continent and culture, are a recognition of that pure love which is not self-seeking but simply benevolent. At the same time, the devotion of the faithful shows an infallible intuition of how such love is possible: it becomes so as a result of the most intimate union with God, through which the soul is totally pervaded by him - a condition which enables those who have drunk from the fountain of God's love to become in their turn a fountain from which "flow rivers of living water" (*Jn* 7:38). Mary, Virgin and Mother, shows us what love is and whence it draws its origin and its constantly renewed power. To her we entrust the Church and her mission in the service of love:

Holy Mary, Mother of God, you have given the world its true light, Jesus, your Son - the Son of God. You aban-

doned yourself completely to God's call and thus became a wellspring of the goodness which flows forth from him. Show us Jesus. Lead us to him. Teach us to know and love him, so that we too can become capable of true love and be fountains of living water in the midst of a thirsting world.

*Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, on 25 December, the Solemnity of the Nativity of the Lord, in the year 2005, the first of my Pontificate.*

# **Instruction Concerning the Criteria for the Discernment of Vocations with regard to Persons with Homosexual Tendencies in view of their Admission to the Seminary and to Holy Orders**

**CONGREGATION FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION**

## ***Introduction***

In continuity with the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and, in particular, with the Decree *Optatam Totius*<sup>1</sup> on priestly formation, the Congregation for Catholic Education has published various Documents with the aim of promoting a suitable, integral formation of future priests, by offering guidelines and precise norms regarding its diverse aspects.<sup>2</sup> In the

<sup>1</sup> Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on priestly formation *Optatam Totius* (28 October 1965): AAS 58 (1966), 713-727.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education. *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* (6 January 1970; second edition 19 March 1985); The Study of Philo-

meantime, the 1990 Synod of Bishops also reflected on the formation of priests in the circumstances of the present day, with the intention of bringing to completion the doctrine of the Council on this theme and making it more explicit and effective in today's world. Following this Synod, Pope John Paul II published the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis*

In the light of this abundant teaching, the present Instruction does not intend to dwell on all questions in the area of affec-

sophy in Seminaries (20 January 1972); A Guide to Formation in Priestly Celibacy (11 April 1974); On the Teaching of Canon Law to Those Preparing to be Priests (2 April 1975); The Theological Formation of Future Priests (22 February 1976); *Epistula circularis deformatione vocationum adularum* (14 July 1976); Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries (3 June 1979); Circular Letter Concerning Some of the More Urgent Aspects of Spiritual Formation in Seminaries (6 January 1980); Educational Guidance in Human Love: Outlines for Sex Education (1 November 1983); Pastoral Care of People on the Move in the Formation of Future Priests (25 January 1986); Guide to the Training of Future Priests Concerning the Instruments of Social Communication (19 March 1986); Circular Letter Concerning Studies of the Oriental Churches (6 January 1987); The Virgin Mary in Intellectual and Spiritual Formation (25 March 1988); Guidelines for the Study and Teaching of the Church's Social Doctrine in the Formation of Priests (30 December 1988); Instruction on the Study of the Fathers of the Church in the Formation of Priests (10 November 1989); Directives Concerning the Preparation of Seminary Educators (4 November 1993); Directives on the Formation of Seminarians Concerning Problems Related to Marriage and the Family (19 March 1995); Instruction to the Episcopal Conferences on the Admission to Seminary of Candidates Coming from Other Seminaries or Religious Families (9 October 1986 and 8 March 1996); The Propaedeutic Period (1 May 1998); Circular Letters Concerning the Canonical Norms relating to Irregularities and Impediments both *ad Ordines recipiendos* and *ad Ordines exercendos* (27 July 1992 and 2 February 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Pope John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Pastores Dabo Vobis* (25 March 1992): AAS 84 (1992), 657-864.

tivity and sexuality that require an attentive discernment during the entire period of formation. Rather, it contains norms concerning a specific question, made more urgent by the current situation, and that is: whether to admit to the seminary and to holy orders candidates who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies.

### ***I. Affective Maturity and Spiritual Fatherhood***

According to the constant Tradition of the Church, only a baptized person of the male sex<sup>4</sup> validly receives sacred Ordination. By means of the Sacrament of Orders, the Holy Spirit configures the candidate to Jesus Christ in a new and specific way: the priest, in fact, sacramentally represents Christ, the head, shepherd and spouse of the Church.<sup>5</sup> Because of this configuration to Christ, the entire life of the sacred minister must be animated by the gift of his whole person to the Church and by an authentic pastoral charity.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *CIC*, can. 1024 and *CCEO*, can. 754; Pope John Paul II. Apostolic Letter *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis* on reserving priestly ordination to men alone (22 May 1994): AAS 86 (1994), 545-548.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Decree on the ministry and life of priests *Presbyterorum Ordinis* (7 December 1965), n. 2: AAS 58 (1966), 991-993; *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 16: AAS 84 (1992), 681-682. With regard to the priest's configuration to Christ, Bridegroom of the Church, *Pastores Dabo Vobis* states that "The priest is called to be the living image of Jesus Christ, the Spouse of the Church.... In his spiritual life, therefore, he is called to live out Christ's spousal love toward the Church, his bride. Therefore, the priest's life ought to radiate this spousal character, which demands that he be a witness to Christ's spousal love" (n. 22): AAS 84 (1992), 691.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, n. 14: AAS 58 (1966), 1013-1014; *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, n. 23: AAS 84 (1992), 691-694.

The candidate to the ordained ministry, therefore, must reach affective maturity. Such maturity will allow him to relate correctly to both men and women, developing in him a true sense of spiritual fatherhood towards the Church community that will be entrusted to him.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. *Homosexuality and the Ordained Ministry*

From the time of the Second Vatican Council until today, various Documents of the Magisterium, and especially the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, have confirmed the teaching of the Church on homosexuality. The *Catechism* distinguishes between homosexual acts and homosexual tendencies.

Regarding *acts*, it teaches that Sacred Scripture presents them as grave sins. The Tradition has constantly considered them as intrinsically immoral and contrary to the natural law. Consequently, under no circumstance can they be approved.

Deep-seated homosexual *tendencies*, which are found in a number of men and women, are also objectively disordered and, for those same people, often constitute a trial. Such persons must be accepted with respect and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided. They are called to fulfill God's will in their lives and to unite to the sacrifice of the Lord's Cross the difficulties they may encounter.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Congregation for the Clergy, Directory on the Ministry and Life of Priests (31 March 1994), n. 58.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (editio typica, 1997), nn. 2357-2358. Cf. also the various Documents of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: Declaration *Persona Humana* on certain questions concerning sexual ethics (29

In the light of such teaching, this Dicastery, in accord with the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, believes it necessary to state clearly that the Church, while profoundly respecting the persons in question,<sup>9</sup> cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practise homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called "gay culture"<sup>7, 10</sup>

Such persons, in fact, find themselves in a situation that gravely hinders them from relating correctly to men and women. One must in no way overlook the negative consequences that can derive from the ordination of persons with deep-seated homosexual tendencies.

Different, however, would be the case in which one were dealing with homosexual tendencies that were only the expression of a transitory problem - for example, that of an

December 1975); Letter *Homosexualitatis Problema* to the Bishops of the Catholic Church on the pastoral care of homosexual persons (1 October 1986); Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on Non-discrimination of Homosexual Persons (23 July 1992); Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions Between Homosexual Persons (3 June 2003). With regard to homosexual inclinations, the Letter *Homosexualitatis Problema* states that "Although the particular inclination of the homosexual person is not a sin, it is a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil; and thus the inclination itself must be seen as an objective disorder" (n. 3).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (eclitio typica. 1997), n. 2358; cf. also *CIC*, can. 208 and *CCEO*, can. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Congregation for Catholic Education, A memorandum to Bishops seeking advice in matters concerning homosexuality and candidates for admission to Seminary (9 July 1985); Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Letter (16 May 2002): *Notitiae* 38 (2002), 586.



adolescence not yet superseded. Nevertheless, such tendencies must be clearly overcome at least three years before ordination to the diaconate.

### **3. *Discernment by the Church Concerning the Suitability of Candidates***

There are two inseparable elements in every priestly vocation: the free gift of God and the responsible freedom of the man. A vocation is a gift of divine grace, received through the Church, in the Church and for the service of the Church. In responding to the call of God, the man offers himself freely to him in love.<sup>11</sup> The desire alone to become a priest is not sufficient, and there does not exist a right to receive sacred ordination. It belongs to the Church - in her responsibility to define the necessary requirements for receiving the sacraments instituted by Christ - to discern the suitability of him who desires to enter the seminary,<sup>12</sup> to accompany him during his years of formation, and to call him to holy orders if he is judged to possess the necessary qualities.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, nn. 35-36: AAS 84 (1992), 714-718.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *CIC*, can. 241 1: "A diocesan Bishop is to admit to a major seminary only those who are judged qualified to dedicate themselves permanently to the sacred ministries; he is to consider their human, moral, spiritual and intellectual qualities, their physical and psychic health, and their correct intention"; cf. *CCEO*, can. 342 1.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Optatam Totius*, n. 6: AAS 58 (1966), 717. Cf. also *CIC*, can. 1029: "Only those are to be promoted to orders who, in the prudent judgment of their own Bishop or of the competent major superior, all things considered, have integral faith, are moved by the right intention, have the requisite knowledge, possess a good reputation, and are endowed with integral morals and proven

The formation of the future priest must distinctly articulate, in an essentially complementary manner, the four dimensions of formation: human, spiritual, intellectual and pastoral.<sup>14</sup> In this context, it is necessary to highlight the particular importance of human formation as the necessary foundation of all formation.<sup>15</sup> In order to admit a candidate to ordination to the diaconate, the Church must verify, among other things, that the candidate has reached affective maturity.<sup>16</sup>

The call to orders is the personal responsibility of the Bishop<sup>17</sup> or the major superior. Bearing in mind the opinion of those to whom he has entrusted the responsibility of formation, the Bishop or major superior, before admitting the candidate to ordination, must arrive at a morally certain judgment on

virtues and the other physical and psychic qualities in keeping with the order to be received"; cf. *CCEO*, can. 758. Not to call to orders those who do not have the necessary qualities is not an unjust discrimination: cf. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Some Considerations Concerning the Response to Legislative Proposals on Non-discrimination of Homosexual Persons*.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, nn. 43-59: AAS 84 (1992). 731-762.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, n. 43: "The priest, who is called to be a 'living image' of Jesus Christ, head and shepherd of the Church, should seek to reflect in himself, as far as possible, the human perfection which shines forth in the incarnate Son of God and which is reflected with particular liveliness in his attitudes toward others": AAS 84 (1992), 732.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, nn. 44 and 50: AAS 84 (1992). 733-736 and 746-748. Cf. also: Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, Circular Letter to the Most Reverend Diocesan Bishops and Other Ordinaries with Canonical Faculties to Admit to Sacred Orders Concerning: Scrutinies regarding the Suitability of Candidates for Orders (10 November 1997); *Notitiae* 33 (1997), 507-518, particularly Enclosure V.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Congregation for Bishops, Directory for the Pastoral Ministry of Bishops *Apostolorum Successors* (22 February 2004), n. 88.

his qualities. In the case of a serious doubt in this regard, he must not admit him to ordination.<sup>18</sup>

The discernment of a vocation and of the maturity of the candidate is also a serious duty of the rector and of the other persons entrusted with the work of formation in the seminary. Before every ordination, the rector must express his own judgment on whether the qualities required by the Church are present in the candidate.<sup>19</sup>

In the discernment concerning the suitability for ordination, the spiritual director has an important task. Although he is bound to secrecy, he represents the Church in the internal forum. In his discussions with the candidate, the spiritual director must especially point out the demands of the Church concerning priestly chastity and the affective maturity that is characteristic of the priest, as well as help him to discern whether he has the necessary qualities.<sup>20</sup> The spiritual director has the obligation to evaluate all the qualities of the candidate's personality and to make sure that he does not present

<sup>18</sup> Cf. *CIC*, can. 1052 3: "If... the Bishop doubts for specific reasons whether a candidate is suitable to receive orders, he is not to promote him". Cf. also *CCEO*, can. 770.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *CIC*, can. 1051: "The following prescripts regarding the investigation about the qualities required in the one to be ordained are to be observed: ...there is to be a testimonial of the rector of the seminary or house of formation about the qualities required to receive the order, that is, about the sound doctrine of the candidate, his genuine piety, good morals and aptitude to exercise the ministry, as well as, after a properly executed inquiry, about his state of physical and psychic health".

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Pastores Dabo Vobis*, nn. 50 and 66: AAS 84 (1992), 746-748 and 772-774. Cf. also *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis*, n. 48.

disturbances of a sexual nature, which are incompatible with the priesthood. If a candidate practises homosexuality or presents deep-seated homosexual tendencies, his spiritual director as well as his confessor have the duty to dissuade him in conscience from proceeding towards ordination.

It goes without saying that the candidate himself has the primary responsibility for his own formation.<sup>21</sup> He must offer himself trustingly to the discernment of the Church, of the Bishop who calls him to orders, of the rector of the seminary, of his spiritual director and of the other seminary educators to whom the Bishop or major superior has entrusted the task of forming future priests. It would be gravely dishonest for a candidate to hide his own homosexuality in order to proceed, despite everything, towards ordination. Such a deceitful attitude does not correspond to the spirit of truth, loyalty and openness that must characterize the personality of him who believes he is called to serve Christ and his Church in the ministerial priesthood.

### ***Conclusion***

This Congregation reaffirms the need for Bishops, major superiors and all relevant authorities to carry out an attentive discernment concerning the suitability of candidates for holy orders, from the time of admission to the seminary until ordination. This discernment must be done in light of a conception of the ministerial priesthood that is in accordance with the teaching of the Church.

*Cf. Pastores Dabo Vobis, n. 69: AAS 84 (1992). 778.*

Let Bishops, episcopal conferences and major superiors look to see that the constant norms of this Instruction be faithfully observed for the good of the candidates themselves, and to guarantee that the Church always has suitable priests who are true shepherds according to the Heart of Christ.

*The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, on 31 August 2005, approved this present Instruction and ordered its publication.*

Rome, 4 November 2005, Memorial of St Charles Borromeo, Patron of Seminaries.

**Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski**

*Prefect*

**J. Michael Miller, C.S.B.**

Tit. Archbp. of Vertara

*Secretary*

# Can Gays Be Priests?\*

TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE, O.P.

Two weeks ago I was in Nova Scotia, giving a retreat for the bishops and priests of eastern Canada. A priest sent up a piece of paper with a question that he was too shy to ask publicly: "Will this document on the admission of gays to the priesthood mean that I am not welcome anymore? Does it mean that people like me are second-class priests?" I have heard this same question, in one form or another, from priests all over the world. The forthcoming Vatican document on homosexuality and the priesthood is the focus of intense anxiety, which is why we must attend to exactly what it says.

There are two principles to bear in mind: first, we must give it as positive an interpretation as possible. This is not a matter of putting a positive spin on documents but of trying to discern what are the true intentions of the authors. Our media are filled with accusation and this document will be denounced as another attack on gay people. This denunciation

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also occurs within the Church. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith has often given tendentious interpretations of the writings of theologians. Theologians, in turn, give the most negative possible interpretation of Vatican documents. Nothing good can come from Rome! As a Church we must find another way of listening to each other, which really attends to what is said. Justice and truthfulness demand this.

Second, a vocation is a call from God. It is true that, as the document says, it is "received through the Church, in the Church and for the service of the Church", but it is God who calls. Having worked with bishops and priests, diocesan and religious, all over the world, I have no doubt that God does call homosexuals to the priesthood, and they are among the most dedicated and impressive priests I have met. So no priest who is convinced of his vocation should feel that this document classifies him as a defective priest. And we may presume that God will continue to call both homosexuals and heterosexuals to the priesthood because the Church needs the gifts of both. The Church has a right and a duty to exercise careful discernment in the admission of seminarians. When the document says that this has been made "more urgent by the current situation", then presumably it is thinking of the crisis of sexual abuse that has shaken the Church in the West. So there are two questions: **does this document provide good criteria for discerning who has a vocation? And will it help to address the crisis of sexual abuse?**

The document insists that a candidate for the priesthood must reach an affective maturity that "will allow him to relate

properly with men and women, developing in him a true sense of spiritual fatherhood for the ecclesial community that will be entrusted to him". Let us leave aside for the moment the question of "spiritual fatherhood" and focus on affective maturity. What does this mean?

The document states that the Church "cannot admit to Seminary or Holy Orders those who are actively homosexual, have deep-seated homosexual tendencies, or support the so-called gay culture". The first criterion is straightforward. The same could be said of those who are actively heterosexual. The second two need clarification. What is meant by a "deep-seated homosexual tendency"? The counter-example given by the document is of someone who goes through a temporary phase of homosexual attraction, and asserts, that the seminarian should have overcome this at least three years before ordination to the diaconate. That would not cover all the cases of seminarians who are reflecting on their vocation in the light of this document. It could also be interpreted as "having a permanent homosexual orientation". But this cannot be correct since, as I have said, there are many excellent priests who are gay and who clearly have a vocation from God. Perhaps it is best understood as meaning that **someone whose sexual orientation is so central to his self-perception as to be obsessive, dominating his imagination**. This would indeed pose questions as to whether he would be able to live happily as a celibate priest. But any heterosexual who was so focused on his sexuality would have problems too. What matters is sexual maturity rather than orientation.

Then there is the issue of supporting "gay culture". It is right that seminarians or priests should not go to gay bars and



that seminaries should not develop a gay subculture. This would be to celebrate as central to their lives what is not fundamental. Seminarians should learn to be at ease with whatever is their sexual orientation, content with the heart that God has given them, but any sort of sexual sub-culture, gay or straight, would be subversive of celibacy. A macho subculture filled with heterosexual innuendo would be just as inappropriate. But does supporting a "gay culture" mean only that? As the document says, the Church must oppose "unjust discrimination" against homosexuals, just as it does racial discrimination. That means that all priests must be prepared to side with gay people if they suffer oppression, and be seen to be on their side. Of course this raises complex issues. To oppose gay marriage will be seen by some people as discrimination, whereas in official Catholic teaching it is not. If one becomes involved in any opposition to discrimination, then one is liable to be misunderstood. It is a risk that one must sometimes take. Finally, there is the question of "spiritual fatherhood". This is not a concept with which I am familiar.

Can only heterosexuals offer this? This is the view of the Bishop to the American armed forces, who said recently: "We don't want our people to think, as our culture is now saying, there's really no difference whether one is gay or straight, is homosexual or heterosexual. We think for our vocation that there is a difference, and our people expect to have a male priesthood that sets a strong role model of maleness." I cannot believe that this is what is intended by the document. There is little evidence of muscular Christianity in the Vatican. If the role of the priest was to be a model

of masculinity, then he would be relevant to less than half of the congregation and one could therefore argue that women should also be ordained as role models of femininity. I presume that the "spiritual fatherhood" is above all exercised through the care of the people and the preaching of a life-giving fertile word, but neither has any connection with sexual orientation. It is extremely urgent that we form priests who are "affectively mature", and able to relate easily to men and women.

This document tries to identify criteria that will help to discern that maturity and points to issues that are undeniably important. These criteria need to be applied equally to all candidates, regardless of their sexual orientation. Our society often gives the impression that heterosexuals and homosexuals are virtually two species of human being. But the human heart is complex and patterns of desire shift and evolve. I have known priests who thought that they were gay when they were 30, and then discover that they were not, and vice versa. If we are to form priests who will live their celibacy fruitfully then they must be at ease with themselves, in all their emotional complexity, without being deluded into thinking that it is the core of our identity. Christ is the core of a priest's identity. "It does not yet appear what we shall be, but when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (I John 3:2).

Our society is obsessed by sex and the Church should offer a model of a sane but not compulsive acceptance of sexuality. The Catechism of the Council of Trent taught that priests should talk about sex "with moderation rather than copiousness". We should be more attentive to whom our

seminarians may be inclined to hate than whom they love. Racialism, misogyny and homophobia would all be signs that someone could not be a good model of Christ. The document concludes by urging seminarians to be truthful to their spiritual directors. To lie would not correspond with "the spirit of truth, loyalty, and availability that must characterize the personality of one who considers himself called to serve Christ and his Church in the ministerial priesthood". This is of fundamental importance. But if the criteria of this document are interpreted in a narrow sense to mean that no one who is gay can be ordained, then some seminarians would find themselves to be in an impossible situation. If they speak openly, then they may not be accepted. If they do not, then they are failing in transparency. The danger is that the most honest may therefore leave and the less truthful stay, and so we would form a priesthood that would be immature, ill at ease with itself, and more liable to continue abuse. It is therefore most important that these criteria are not interpreted in a way that drives people into concealment. That would actively impede the formation of priests who are affectively mature.

# **A Nuanced Response to the Instruction**

**BRUCE WILLIAMS, O.P.**

The subtitle of this reflection carries two meanings: (a) Rome has given a nuanced response on the issue of admitting gay men to the priesthood; (b) the way we read and respond to this new Instruction should be likewise nuanced.

A number of comments, based on a leaked text circulated about a week before the official release of the Instruction, have picked up on the nuanced language of the document. Other comments have not. The latter group comprises reactions at extreme opposite poles. Among pro-gay and anti-gay advocates alike, several have concluded - whether sorrowfully, angrily, or gleefully - that at least in practice the Instruction totally bans gay men from the priesthood. These commentators either ignore or dismiss as insignificant those elements of the Instruction involving vague language, calling for prudent vocational discernment by candidates and formators in individual cases, and professing respect for the gay men concerned.

Such refusal to countenance nuance is not only unfair to the authors of the Instruction but unhelpful to the task of applying the document in practice. Engagement with nuance is indispensable if we are to follow the sage advice of my esteemed Dominican brother Timothy Radcliffe, former Master of our Order, who urges us to read the Instruction as benignly as reasonably possible. This would not preclude expressing disappointment with certain statements or omissions in the Instruction. Nor does it mean that we play clever word games so as to invent fictitious nuances that belie the document's clear intent. The benign reading Fr. Timothy calls for must, of course, be consistent with honesty. But if we ignore or reject nuances that are quite evidently called for in the text of the Instruction itself, our reading of the document is neither honest nor benign. Frankly, it appears to me that many of the unnuanced readings reflect attitudes either toward the magisterium (on the one side) or toward gays (on the other) that are quite the opposite of benign.

By contrast, readers attentive to nuance have generally concluded that the new Instruction does not expressly or even implicitly require the absolute exclusion of all gay men from the priesthood. Naturally the main focus of these commentators has been on this key passage in the document: "...[T]he Church, while profoundly respecting the persons in question, cannot admit to the seminary or to holy orders those who practice homosexuality, present deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called 'gay culture'." The expression of profound respect for the persons in question should be accepted as genuine, in line with the over-all benign approach advocated above. As for the description of those

held to be unsuitable for priestly candidacy or ordination, let us examine each element in turn.

- a) Those who practice homosexuality. This is obvious. Men who are actually involved in unchaste behavior of any kind - here, specifically, genital interaction with other men - clearly are not effectively committed to or preparing for a way of life that demands celibate chastity.
- b) Those who present deep-seated homosexual tendencies. Here most commentators have fastened on the expression "deep-seated," and some have also proposed to nuance "tendencies." While it is appropriate to raise questions about these terms, it may be even more fruitful to begin by examining the word "homosexual."

As popularly understood nowadays, "homosexual" (or even "gay") is apt to refer generically to anyone whose affective sensibilities are mainly geared toward others of the same sex, whether or not those sensibilities are expressed in genital or pre-genital actions or desires. But in documents of the Roman magisterium, consistently and without exception, the word "homosexual" always bears on genital activity. Maybe the clearest example is in *Homosexualitatis problema* where "the homosexual condition" is described as "a more or less strong tendency ordered toward an intrinsic moral evil" (n. 3). The genital reference is likewise clear in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (nn. 2357-2359). I know of no instance in which the magisterium has employed the word "homosexual" merely to describe affective sensibility unrelated to the issue of genital behavior.

Granting the likelihood (as we should) that the meaning of "homosexual" in the present Instruction is consistent with its meaning in all other official Roman church documents, it would follow that by "homosexual tendencies" we are to understand a pattern of "more or less strong" impulses ("tendencies") toward genital interaction with same-sex partners ("homosexual"). The further qualification "deep-seated" suggests at least that these genital desires are chronic and will likely pose a serious issue for the person throughout his life.

As I have noted in an earlier reflection, the magisterium supposes that the psychic and spiritual life of such a person is apt to be impaired in various ways. His fragile and precarious interior chastity is seen as evidence of affective immaturity and as impeding him "from relating properly to men and women." The Instruction then refers without further specification to "negative consequences" of ordaining such persons - perhaps just summarizing the above, perhaps suggesting other unmentioned problems such as the absorption of psychic energy in a perpetual struggle against unchaste urges. All such impairments would foreseeably impede one from faithful and fruitful ministry.

- c) Those who support the so-called 'gay culture'. Here the obvious questions are: (a) what is meant by "gay culture"? and (b) what constitutes "support" for it? Taken in the strongest sense, these terms would denote someone actively involved in gay social/cultural/political activities - an involvement that would normally include being an "out" gay man, whether engaged in homogenital activity or not. The

sense of the Instruction might well extend also to some less thoroughgoing forms of "support" for "gay culture," e.g., political activism in gay causes without significant involvement in gay social life, or vice versa.

I would suggest two more precisions in this regard. First, one might very well be "supporting gay culture" without being gay himself; I personally know some unquestionably "straight" men who are gay-culture supporters at least in the qualified sense just explained. Second, endorsing some particular political objective (e.g., anti-discrimination legislation) should not, of itself, be construed as supporting gay culture; surely there is a difference between promoting a specific political proposal and promoting gay culture as such. The latter would at least suggest an affirming attitude toward gayness in a global sense; and since the magisterium does not share this attitude, it understandably does not want priests to espouse it.

Summing up this whole analysis, the following may serve as thumbnail descriptions of the men who the Instruction says should be excluded from Seminary or Holy Orders:

- genitally active gay men;
- gay men who habitually contend with genital desires/impulses;
- men who define and affirm themselves as "gay" in a way that bespeaks impaired relational ability;
- men who broadly identify with gay sociopolitical interests, even if they do not fall into any of the three previous categories.



These criteria would appear not to exclude a good number of men who might be broadly described as "gay" in common parlance. Consider a man who was homogenitally active in the past and overcame or outgrew this activity in young adulthood. He still experiences warm affection toward men, but homogenital temptations are extremely infrequent and always dismissed quickly and easily. He has never been sexually attracted to women, though he relates normally and even warmly to them also. He does not participate or take an interest in "gay culture," though he does favor some particular political initiatives aimed at securing civil rights for homosexual people. He is comfortable with who he is by the grace of God, and wants to give himself to the Lord's service as a celibate priest. He is not "in the closet" about his sexuality, but sexual orientation does not enter into his self-definition; it simply is not an issue in his life, nor is he driven to make an issue of it in dealing with others. Many people might still label such a man as "gay"; he might even accept this designation, understanding it as an acknowledgment of some affectional and lightly erotic but essentially non-genital bearing toward other men. One could argue whether the appellation "gay" is appropriate here; but, as far as I can see, one cannot plausibly argue that this man has "deep-seated homosexual tendencies" or "supports gay culture" in the sense conveyed by the new Roman Instruction.

Key to this whole line of argument is a distinction between sexuality in its affective dimensions and sexuality in its genital bearing. I acknowledge that this distinction can often be murky in practice and perhaps also to some extent even in theory; but I would also strongly maintain that the

distinction is at least vaguely definable in theory and is vividly evident in a good number of practical cases. In heterosexual as well as homosexual contexts, we are all too painfully familiar with sordid scenarios of exploitation and violence illustrating the pursuit of genital gratification devoid of anything resembling love or affection. Conversely there are also clear instances of genuine interpersonal love devoid of any genital interest, though not without significant emotional components that could be broadly designated as "sexual."

True, in a great many other cases the distinction between genital and non-genital "sexuality" cannot be so neatly drawn. That is one major reason, among several others, why the Instruction must insist on prudent discernment of each person's vocation - primarily by the man himself, but in a relationship of openness and docility with formators and spiritual directors or confessors. These elements of the Instruction are not just cosmetic; they are essential for a proper application of the norms in question. Is a particular candidate, once actively gay, now safely past any likely reinvolvement with homogenital activity? How frequently and severely does he experience homogenital fantasies or impulses or desires? How does he understand himself as a sexual person? Are there problems in his over-all relationships with men and/or women? How does he relate to "gay culture" and to the sexual teaching of the magisterium? The answers to such questions, and their significance for the candidate's vocation, cannot be found in a prefabricated formula; they can only be arrived at through a sensitive prudential process.

Approaching its conclusion, the Instruction calls upon aspirants and candidates to be honest with their superiors

and counselors, warning that it would be "dishonest" and "deceitful" for one to "hide his own homosexuality" so as to avoid being rejected for ordination. Again it seems evident that "homosexuality" here refers to genital activities or proclivities, or to other psychosexual issues, which present serious doubts about one's prospects for living chastely or for engaging in wholesome interpersonal relationships such as are requisite for authentic Christian ministry. Rather than reacting against the Instruction's admonition as though it were an attempt to intimidate candidates, we should understand it as a reminder that honesty - with oneself and others - is an indispensable ingredient in the prudential process of vocational discernment.

At the same time, we may note that the honesty commended here is likely to depend on the candidates' being assured that the discernment process they are involved in is not one of intimidation but of prudence, for their own good as well as that of the Church. This assurance must include their confidence of being heard and treated with genuine respect and sensitivity. Ideally the process should be one in which the candidate and his formators collaborate in discerning together the appropriate solution to questions that arise regarding a vocation, in light of an honest and thorough examination of all relevant factors. When the factors point to a negative conclusion as to one's vocation, the Instruction admonishes confessors and spiritual directors to "dissuade" the candidate from continuing. Unmentioned, though not expressly repudiated, is the specific directive from former times that in the event of unchastity confessors were to prohibit the candidate from proceeding toward the priest-

hood, on pain of denial of absolution, in case the candidate refused to be "dissuaded" and still proposed to go forward. In any case, the Instruction expressly reiterates the obligation of secrecy attaching to any communication in the internal forum.

The reader will have noticed that most of the points raised here do not apply exclusively to candidates who are "homosexual." Analogous considerations would be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to heterosexually oriented candidates as well. No responsible formator would discern a likely priestly vocation in one who is or has recently been sexually involved with women, or whose energies are significantly taken up with the corresponding fantasies or desires, or who frequents "swinging singles" clubs, or advocates cohabitation, and the like. I wish the Instruction would call attention to this.

Why, then, the special focus on homosexuality? A two-fold reply seems warranted here. The first and simplest one is that the Instruction expressly states, in its Introduction, that it "does not intend to dwell on all questions in the area affectivity and sexuality that require an attentive discernment during the entire period of formation." It is purposely focusing on "a specific question, made more urgent by the current situation, and that is: whether to admit to the seminary and to holy orders candidates who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies." Again notice the last phrase here, which we analyzed above in connection with its recurrence in the Instruction's norms. So, the Instruction does not deny that comparable points would be appropriately applied to the vocational discernment of heterosexual candidates; but it prescinds from these candidates so as to concentrate on a particular

current issue connected with an ongoing crisis. This last point, moreover, does not amount to "scapegoating" gay men for the scandal of clergy sex abuse and hierarchical coverup. Its brief mention is no more than an acknowledgment that the scandal has furnished an added occasion for revisiting the "specific question" concerning those with "deep-seated homosexual tendencies."

The second reply admittedly involves some hypothesizing, based on extrapolation from between the lines of the Instruction as well as a consideration of the present cultural and political climate. I agree with others who have speculated that a significant part of the agenda of this Instruction, beyond its stated objective of addressing the need for sound priestly vocational discernment, is to combat the notion - influential within as well as outside the Church - that homosexuality can be a wholesome orientation on a par with heterosexuality. Among a considerable number of Catholics, as well as many others, homosexuality is viewed as a "neutral or even good" variation within God's creation. Even priests who renounce genital acts or desires by way of a religious commitment to celibacy might support this "overly benign" view of homosexuality as an orientation (cf. CDF 1986, n. 3). A very lucid explanation of why the magisterium frowns on this attitude was offered more than 20 years ago by Fr. Robert Nugent, S.D.S. Nugent himself later ran afoul of the CDF over homosexuality; but here he explains the outlook of the magisterium clearly:

"...Many people are opposed to public disclosures of homosexuality among celibates simply because

they disvalue not only homosexual behavior on moral grounds, but... also the orientation on psychological, social, and other grounds... Nor do they believe that a homosexual orientation can fulfill the real meaning of human sexuality in the same way that heterosexuality does. Heterosexuality remains "normative" ...And so if a person believes that a homosexual orientation is "morally neutral," but still deficient in other ways (lack of procreative possibilities, lack of complementarity, violation of the fundamental sexual differences and symbolism, etc.), he or she will not want to give the impression that a homosexual orientation is as acceptable as a sexual identity, apart from actual behavior, as a heterosexual orientation...."

This broader issue is barely hinted at in the present Instruction, though the accompanying commentary in the *L'Osservatore Romano* - which does not share in the authority of the Instruction itself - is much more explicit here (and generally suggests a more stringent interpretation of the Instruction's norms than what I have proposed). I stated in my earlier reflection, and I restate now, that I count myself among those calling for a more open and far-ranging theological conversation in the Church concerning the broader spectrum of issues pertaining to homosexuality. The Instruction does not foreclose such a conversation; it merely takes for granted the received tradition of the Church, and on that basis addresses a "specific question" of current interest. Rather than lament the Instruction's non-pursuit of the larger

issues that underlie its more specific concern, we do better to welcome the practical guidance it does offer and, above all, to take up its call for a discernment of priestly vocations that is characterized by rigorous integrity as well as genuine benevolence toward all persons concerned and indeed toward the Church.

# **A Flood of Commentary**

**RICHARD JOHN NEUHAUS**

There is lively interest, to put it gently, in the Instruction from Rome regarding the admission of those with strong same-sex attractions to the seminary and priesthood. It says, among other things, "When dealing... with homosexual tendencies that might only be a manifestation of a transitory problem, as, for example, delayed adolescence, these must be clearly overcome at least three years before diaconal ordination." On the other hand, men with a fixed and "deep-seated" identity as homosexuals should not be ordained.

The Instruction from the Congregation for Catholic Education has the merit of making difficult but necessary distinctions with respect to homosexuality. The American media tend to use the word "gay" to cover everything from an adolescent crush on an eleven-year-old friend to an adult addiction to bath house orgies.

Those who would nitpick the Instruction into irrelevance raise numerous objections. They say, for instance, that it does not explain the difference between "transitory" and



"deep-seated" homosexual tendencies. They should check a dictionary.

A canon lawyer says, "You can slice and dice this thing a thousand different ways." Only if you are really determined to do so. Others observe that it is issued as a statement of the Congregation and not directly by the Pope. The fact is that the Pope approved the document and ordered its release. There is no doubt about its binding authority.

Father James Martin, a Jesuit, is a more straightforward critic of the Instruction. "An honest reading of the document shows that the Vatican is simply banning gays," he said. "The 'application' of the document, even the portion of the document that says that rectors are ultimately responsible for their men, will be meaningless: No emotionally mature gay applicant these days will want to enter." With respect to the "mature" gay, see the Instruction on "delayed adolescence" - or, as it used to be termed in psychiatric circles, arrested adolescence.

The flood of commentary on the Instruction on homosexuality and the priesthood will not likely abate for some time. Here is William Saletan at *Slate* targeting what he views as the pope's hangup about homosexuality, imaginatively titled "Gland Inquisitor":

"Notice two things. First, deep-rooted 'tendencies' are now independent and automatic grounds for dismissal, regardless of whether you 'practice' homosexuality or 'support' gay culture (whatever that is). Second, even if these tendencies are merely a 'situation' in which you 'find yourself,' they

'gravely obstruct' you from relating properly to men and women. Through no fault of your own, you're doomed. The *Catechism's* paths to perfection - self-mastery, chastity, prayer, and grace - no longer suffice. The church won't settle for your self-restraint, even with God's help."

Contra Saletan, the Church pastorally cares and prays for people who struggle with disordered desires. But she should not jeopardize the mission of the priesthood by ordaining those who are thought likely to succumb to such desires.

Cardinal Grocholewski, head of the dicastery issuing the Instruction, puts it this way: "It is not discrimination, for example, if one does not admit a person who suffers from vertigo to a school for astronauts." More precisely, it is discrimination, although not in the pejorative sense of the term. I suppose it is possible that somebody with a transitory, or even deep-seated, problem with vertigo might be a successful astronaut, but as a matter of policy you don't want to put the possibility to the test.

A fellow who goes by the name of Diogenes gives another comment on the Instruction about not ordaining to the priesthood those with same-sex attractions:

*"Both sets of bishops, those gay and those gay-friendly, have been caught out by the Instruction and will be struggling frantically to put the toothpaste back in the tube. Pay attention to their use of the phrase "affective maturity, " because this is the key term in the Instruction, and the Holy See*

and gay-positive clergy employ the phrase with radically contrary meanings.

*"By affective maturity, the Holy See means the kind of psychological integration and adult equanimity that exclude homosexual tendencies; such propensities may have existed in a man's adolescence, but if he attains emotional maturity he has, by definition, put them behind him.*

*"Gay and gay-friendly clergy, by contrast, insist that affective maturity entails acceptance of whatever one's sexual orientation happens to be. For them, the homosexual who sees his libido as disordered and wants to free himself of it is less mature than the homosexual who has made the decision to live as a gay man, i.e., who accepts and affirms his homosexual tendencies as a given, as part of his identity. A self-proclaimed gay... would be regarded by gay-positive bishops as a paradigm specimen of affective maturity, but the Holy See will see him as a lamentable example of the opposite.*

*Gay-positives insist that an indispensable condition of affective maturity is 'comfort' with one's own sexuality (mature men are comfortable being themselves), and this in turn excludes opprobrium or aversion directed at a 'sexuality other than one's own.' In this view, a heterosexual at peace with his sexual identity does not object to gays as brother priests, any more than a white man*

*at peace with his racial identity would object to blacks. That's why men like Fr. Timothy Radcliffe [former master of the Dominicans] are keen to assert that those who oppose gays in the priesthood are affectively immature, and it is they who shouldn't be admitted to Holy Orders."*

I'm afraid that Diogenes is on to the ways in which some are, in the words of a prominent canon lawyer, "slicing and dicing" the Vatican instruction to their own satisfaction. There are priests and bishops who are afflicted by same-sex attraction, and it is by now no secret that some have acted upon that attraction. Those who are afflicted but have been chastely celibate protest that the Instruction cannot possibly mean that, were they candidates for ordination today, they should be refused. But that is precisely what the Instruction seems to say.

That does not mean they cannot continue as good and faithful priests. Most certainly it does not in any way throw into question the validity of their priesthood and therefore the validity of the sacraments they administer. But it would seem to mean that they should not have been ordained in the first place, and those with a similar lack of "affective maturity" should not be ordained in the future.

The prudential judgment that those suffering from strong same-sex attractions should not be ordained is precisely that, *a prudential judgment*. This is nothing new. The 1961 Vatican Instruction to that effect is well known. *Catholic News Service* draws attention today to a 1985

memorandum from the Holy See that once again reaffirmed that judgment.

It is disingenuous for people to protest that this Instruction is all that new. The protest pits the current cultural orthodoxy of gay affirmation against centuries of teaching that same-sex desires are disordered and acting upon such desires is sinful. And it is really no argument at all that, since those with disqualifying disabilities were ordained in the past, they should be ordained in the future. Those who try to make that argument should have the honesty to admit that they are not interpreting but rejecting the directives of Rome.

# How Will the Instruction be Understood?

JOHN L. ALLEN, JR.

With publication of the Vatican's long-awaited document on gay seminarians and the subsequent torrent of reaction, two questions now seem to loom as paramount: What does the document mean? How will it be understood and enforced?

While the document has already been a media sensation, how much long-term difference it actually makes in the day-to-day practice of seminaries and religious communities may largely turn on how - and whether - these questions are officially resolved, for that could determine whether the ban on gays is absolute or applied on a case-to-case basis.

At the heart of the new document, officially released November 29 but leaked to the Italian press agency *Adista* the previous week following distribution to the Italian bishops, is that men who are "actively homosexual, have deep-seated homosexual tendencies or support the so-called gay culture" cannot be ordained as priests.

**Men who have experienced "transitory" homosexual impulses, however, could be ordained, as long as these impulses have been overcome for three years prior to ordination as deacons.**

**The principal focus of debate so far has been the phrase "deep-seated homosexual tendencies." Does it refer to the mere existence of a stable same-sex orientation, or could it mean a disproportionate fixation on one's sexuality that not all homosexual candidates necessarily exhibit?**

The former reading would exclude virtually all homosexual candidates, while the latter would leave open the possibility of admitting men with an enduring homosexual orientation who are nonetheless judged to be mature, balanced and capable of living a celibate life.

Bishop William Skylstad of Spokane, Wash., president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, seemed to endorse the second, more permissive reading in a November 29 statement.

The instruction, Skylstad said, would rule out a candidate "so concerned with homosexual issues that he cannot sincerely represent the church's teaching on sexuality." The question of whether "homosexually inclined men" can be good priests, Skylstad said, therefore depends on how they live and what they teach.

"The answer lies in the lives of those men who, with God's grace, have truly been dedicated priests, seeking each day not to be served but to serve their people, faithfully representing in word and example the teaching of the church in its fullness, including God's revelation that sexual expression is intended only to take place between a husband

and a wife in a loving, faithful and life-giving marriage," Skylstad said.

Likewise, the Conference of Major Superiors of Men, the largest umbrella group of mens' religious orders in the United States, issued a statement indicating that the aim of the Instruction is to foster a clergy composed of "men who are well integrated and psychologically mature, faithful to church teachings, and who possess a clear understanding of the meaning of, as well as the spiritual and emotional capacity to commit to, chaste celibacy for life."

Given that the comments come from the elected president of the American bishops and the largest body of men's orders, they may well represent a broad cross section of sentiment within the American church. Whether they represent the "legislative intent" of the Vatican, however, is another matter.

While the document itself does not settle the question of what "deep-seated tendencies" means, quasi-official commentaries issued by Vatican officials seem to buttress a much more restrictive reading.

Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, prefect of the Congregation for Catholic Education, gave an interview to Vatican Radio November 29 in which he offered examples of "transitory" homosexual tendencies.

"There could be some curiosity in adolescence that's not resolved," he said. "Or there could be accidental circumstances, such as a drunken state, or particular circumstances such as a person who was in prison for many years," Grocholewski said. "In these cases, the eventual homosexual acts do not come from a profound tendency, but are determined by circumstances. Or, these acts could be performed in order to please somebody for obtaining advantages."



The common denominator in the cases cited by Grocholewski seems to be behavior that results from shifting circumstances, rather than a clear and stable same-sex attraction.

The Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, published a commentary on the instruction November 30, written by Fr. Tony Anatrella, a French priest and psychoanalyst, and a consultor for the Pontifical Council for the Family and the Pontifical Council for Health Pastoral Care.

Anatrella's commentary unambiguously asserts that the point of the instruction is not merely to insist upon celibacy, but to rule out men with a fixed same-sex orientation.

"Candidates who present 'deep-seated homosexual tendencies,' that is, an exclusive attraction with regard to persons of the same sex (a structural orientation) - independently of whether or not they've had erotic experiences - may not be admitted to seminaries and to sacred orders," Anatrella wrote.

Anatrella criticizes a "permissive attitude" that says as long as a candidate is capable of celibacy, he may be ordained.

In fact, Anatrella asserts that gay priests experience a whole host of other difficulties.

Anatrella offered these examples: "Closing oneself off in a clan of persons of the same type; exaggerated affective choices; [becoming] a narcissistic position in front of a community that [the gay priest] disturbs even to the point of dividing it; a mode of vocational discernment that seeks candidates in his own image; relations with authority based on seduction and rejection; ... an often limited vision of truth and a selective way of presenting the Gospel message;

particularly in the areas of sexual and conjugal morality, these are habitually zones of relational and intellectual confusion and ideological combat, disapproved by a correct search for truth and the wisdom of God."

On a more theological level, Anatrella argues that gay priests cannot effectively incarnate a "spousal tie" between God and the church, nor the "spiritual paternity" a priest is supposed to exhibit.

While Anatrella's essay does not carry the weight of the original Instruction, observers say it does represent a quasi-official explication of what the instruction's authors had in mind.

Once a Vatican document is published, however, it becomes a text of the church rather than just the people who wrote it, and sometimes those who didn't want the document in the first place find ways to "limit the damage" through careful interpretation.

Something of that exercise seems to be underway now among bishops, superiors and seminary rectors who don't support a rigid ban on gays.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin of Dublin, Ireland, said November 25, reacting to the leak of the Instruction to the Italian press, that church discipline bars from the priesthood anyone who is sexually active, or who advocates sexual activity outside faithful heterosexual marriage, that the Instruction would not absolutely exclude homosexuals from the priesthood.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor of Westminster, England, said, "The Instruction is not saying that men of homosexual orientation are not welcome in the priesthood.

But it is making clear that they must be capable of affective maturity, have a capacity for celibacy and not share the values of eroticized gay culture."

Archbishop Vincent Nichols of Birmingham, England, told the BBC November 29 that the document establishes "behavioral" tests for admission to the priesthood, leaving open the possibility that a homosexual candidate without behavioral difficulties could still be admitted.

The former master general of the Dominican order, Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, in an essay in the November 26 *Tablet*, wrote that the instruction does not ban men with a "permanent homosexual orientation," because "there are many excellent priests who are gay and who clearly have a vocation from God."

Vocations personnel in various locations have struck similar notes.

"My impression is that this is not any different from what we have been practicing here," Franciscan Sr. Katarina Schuth, a professor of pastoral theology and national consultant on seminary education at St. Paul Seminary in Minnesota, told the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* November 24.

"It's a bit vague, a bit open to interpretation, so it's hard to say for sure how it might be enforced," she said. "But it appears to describe what most seminaries now do - really just a restatement of the 1961 prohibition against ordaining sexually active gay men."

Fr. David Nuss, vocations director for the Toledo, Ohio, diocese, told the National Public Radio program "Talk of the Nation" November 29 that he does not read the new document as a blanket ban on men with homosexual orientation.

"Tendencies or inclinations toward homosexuality, in and of themselves, are not a prohibition for admittance into the seminary or ordination," Nuss said during a program on which an *NCR* reporter also appeared.

"Sexual activity is something that needs to be studied and that needs to be revealed and that needs to be discussed," he said.

The document "shows a tremendous lack of understanding of human sexuality," said Sr. Jeannine Gramick, long an advocate for homosexuals within the church.

Gramick said the fundamental problem she sees with the document is that the writers "consider a homosexual orientation objectively disordered. That idea has to be questioned and examined. And upon examination with contemporary scientific information, they will find that a homosexual orientation is natural for at least 10 percent of the population. They don't want to acknowledge that our knowledge grows, and that as we get more information we need to revise our theology."

Even some commentators generally regarded as "conservative" have seemed open to a distinction between a basic homosexual orientation, and a "deep-seated tendency" that becomes unhealthy.

"The Vatican is prudent not to have an absolute ban on admission of homosexuals to the priesthood," said William Donohue of the Catholic League in a prepared statement. "There are too many good men with homosexual tendencies who have served the church with distinction," Donohue said.

"But there is a monumental difference between someone who is incidentally homosexual and someone for whom the

gay subculture is central to his identity. Only those blinded by sexual politics will fail to make this distinction," Donohue said.

All this suggests that the document may contain enough "latitude" to allow both those wishing to take a strong stance against gays, and those favoring a more case-to-case approach, to find justification.

Some Catholic critics of the document, however, regard efforts to find a more "open" reading as misplaced.

"It will be very tempting for Catholics, especially liberal ones, to focus on questions of 'interpretation' and 'application,' in the hope that the document won't really mean what it says," said Jesuit Fr. James Martin, a noted spiritual writer.

"They are talking about what the contemporary world commonly understands to be gay men, that is, men with a homosexual orientation.... There's little that is unclear."

In a separate issue, some critics have objected to language in the document that calls upon spiritual directors to look for signs of "deep-seated homosexual tendencies" among seminarians, and to attempt to dissuade candidates with such tendencies from ordination.

These critics argue that the effect of such language will be to make seminarians less likely to be honest with spiritual directors.

"The relationship between a seminarian and his confessor or his spiritual director should not be about enforcing church documents, but to serve as spiritual guides," Fr. Michael Herman, an openly gay priest who serves as pastor of St. Sylvester Church in Chicago told *The New York Times*.

# **Gender Orientation and the Priesthood\***

ARCHBISHOP OSCAR V. CRUZ, D.D.

Gender orientation in no way diminishes the inherent dignity of a human person. It is not what sex a person has that makes the difference but what he or she does with it. Human sexuality is an accompaniment of a person that changes his disposition but not constitution. That is why discrimination among persons has no place in civilized society. They are essentially equal.

It is said that homosexuals are not meant for the priesthood. This is however neither a degrading nor a discriminating observance. This is simple reality. It would be difficult for a homosexual to be pushed into a heterosexual milieu. Such is neither logical nor fair.

Let it be said too that heterosexual males unduly inclined to women are neither meant for priesthood. This too is not

\*From *Impact*, vol. 39. no. 9, December 2005. p. 24.

discrimination but the admission of truth. It would be unrealistic to impose on them celibacy. Such would be asking them something extraordinary which is also unfair and unreasonable.

In the same way, just as women are not meant to become priests, men are neither intended to become sisters. This is distinction. Not discrimination. This is reality. The opposite is falsity. Men sisters just as women priests are but dissonant composites - not discriminatory realities.

Every human person must be good for something - though not for everything. While majority of the people get married, these are those who simply do not for one reason or another. They do not feel that marriage is for them. So they remain single for life. This is something connatural for them which do not make them more or less persons.

There are homosexuals who succeed and who fail in temporal matters. So are there heterosexuals who shine or fade in earthly pursuits. What makes them rise or fall is not their sexual identity. It is rather their talents as persons and their opportunities as individuals.

Do unto others what you want others to do unto to you. Who does not know this golden rule? Even children are taught this elementary norm of living. It is a big shame if adults themselves do not know and practice it. This is precisely the case of those who discriminate against anyone on account of gender orientation.

## *DOCUMENTATION*

# **The Eucharist: Living Bread for Peace in the World**

*Message of the XI Ordinary Synod of Bishops*

*Dear brother bishops,  
dear priests and deacons,  
Dearly beloved brothers and sisters*

1. "Peace be with you!" In the name of the Lord who appeared in the Cenacle of Jerusalem on the evening of Easter, we repeat, "Peace be with you!" (Jn 20:21). May the mystery of his death and resurrection bring you consolation and give meaning to the whole of your life! May he keep you joyful and full of hope! For Christ is living in his Church, as he promised (see Mt 28:20). He remains with us always until the end of the world. He gives himself to us in the Most Holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, along with the joy of loving as he loved. He commands us to share his victorious love with our brothers and sisters of the whole world. This is the joyful message that we proclaim to you, beloved brothers and sisters, at the end of the Synod of Bishops on the Eucharist.



Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has again gathered us as in the Cenacle, with Mary the Mother of God and our Mother, to recall the gift par excellence of the Holy Eucharist.

2. Called to Rome by Pope John Paul II, of venerable memory, and confirmed by His Holiness Benedict XVI, we have come from the five continents of the world to pray and reflect together on The Eucharist, Source and Summit of the Life and Mission of the Church. The goal of the Synod was to offer proposals to the Holy Father that might help him to update and deepen the Eucharistic life of the Church. We have been able to experience what the Holy Eucharist has been from the very beginning: one faith and one Church, nourished by one bread of life, in visible communion with the successor of Peter.

3. The fraternal sharing among the Bishops, the auditors, and also the ecumenical representatives, has renewed our conviction that the Holy Eucharist animates and transforms the life of the particular Churches of the East and West, as well as the many human activities in the very different circumstances in which we live. We have sensed a profound joy in experiencing the unity of our Eucharistic faith in the midst of the widespread diversity of rites, cultures and pastoral situations. The presence of so many Brother bishops has allowed us to experience, in a more direct way, the richness of our different liturgical traditions that makes the depths of the unique Eucharistic mystery shine forth.

We invite you, dear Christian brothers and sisters of every confession, to pray more fervently that the day of

reconciliation, and the full visible unity of the Church might come in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist in conformity with the prayer of Jesus on the eve of his death: "That all may be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, that they may be one in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me" (Jn 17:21).

4. Profoundly thankful to God for the Pontificate of the Holy Father, John Paul II, and for his final Encyclical *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, followed by the Apostolic Letter that opened the Year of the Eucharist, *Mane nobiscum Domine*, we ask God to multiply the fruits of his witness and his teaching. We also extend our thanks to all the people of God, whose presence and solidarity we have felt during these three weeks of prayer and reflection. The local Churches in China, and their bishops who were not able to join us in our work, had a special place in our thoughts and prayers.

To all of you, bishops, priests and deacons, missionaries from all the world, consecrated men and women, lay faithful, and also to you, men and women of good will, Peace and Joy in the Holy Spirit in the name of the Risen Christ!

### ***Listening to the Suffering of the World***

5. The meeting of the Synod has been an intense time of sharing and witnessing to the life of the Church in the different continents. We have been made aware of extreme situations and suffering generated by wars, hunger, different forms of terrorism and injustice, which touch the daily life of hundreds of millions of human beings. The explosive violence in the Middle East and in Africa has reminded us that the

African continent has been forgotten by the public opinion of the world. Natural disasters, which seem to have multiplied, force us to look upon nature with greater respect and to strengthen our solidarity with those suffering peoples.

We have not remained silent before the consequences of secularization, present above all in the West, that lead to religious indifference and various expressions of relativism. We have remembered and denounced the situations of injustice and extreme poverty that are in evidence everywhere, but especially in Latin America, in Africa and in Asia. All this suffering cries out to God, and challenges the conscience of humanity. It challenges us all. What is becoming of the global village of our earth, the threatened environment that risks being ruined? What can be done so that, in this era of globalization, solidarity might triumph over suffering and misery? We also direct our thoughts to those who govern the nations that they take diligent care to provide access to the common good for all. We ask that they be promoters of the dignity of every human being, from conception till natural death. We ask them enact laws which respect the natural rights of marriage and the family. For our part, we will continue to participate actively in a common effort to generate lasting conditions for genuine progress for the whole human family, where no one is lacking his or her daily bread.

6. We have carried all these sufferings and these questions with us in our Eucharistic celebration and adoration. In our debates, listening carefully to one another, we have been moved and shaken by the witness of the martyrs who are still present today, as throughout the whole history of the Church, in many areas of the world. The Synod Fathers

have recalled that the martyrs have always found the strength to overcome hatred by love and violence by pardon, thanks to the Holy Eucharist.

*"Do This in Memory of Me"*

7. On the eve of his passion, "Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'Take, eat, this is my body.' Then he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them saying, 'Drink of it all of you; for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' (Mt 26:25-28). "Do this in memory of me" (Lk 22:19; 1 Cor 11:24-25). From its beginnings, the Church has remembered the death and resurrection of Jesus with the same words and actions of the Last Supper, asking the Spirit to transform the bread and wine into the Body and into the Blood of Christ. We firmly believe and we teach in the constant tradition of the Church that the words of Jesus pronounced by the priest at the Mass, in the power of the Holy Spirit, effect what they signify. They bring about the real presence of the risen Christ (CCC 1366). The Church lives from this gift par excellence that gathers it, purifies it and transforms it into the one body of Christ, animated by the one Spirit (see Eph 5:29).

The Eucharist is the gift of love, love of the Father who sent his only Son so that the world might be saved (see Jn 3:16-17); the love of Christ who loved us to the end (see Jn 13:1); the love of God poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (see Rom 5:5), who cries out in us "Abba, Father!" (Gal 4:6). In celebrating the Holy Sacrifice, therefore, we joyfully announce the salvation of the world in proclaiming

the victorious death of the Lord until he comes. In our communion with his Body, we receive the "pledge" of our own resurrection.

8. Forty years after the Second Vatican Council we wanted to examine to what extent the mysteries of the faith are adequately expressed and celebrated in our liturgical assemblies. The Synod reaffirms that the Second Vatican Council provided the necessary basis for an authentic liturgical renewal. It is necessary now to cultivate the positive fruits of this reform, and to correct abuses that have crept into liturgical practice. We are convinced that respect for the sacred character of the liturgy is transmitted by genuine fidelity to liturgical norms of legitimate authority. No one should consider himself master of the Church's liturgy. Living faith that recognizes the presence of the Lord is the first condition for beautiful liturgical celebrations, which give a genuine "Amen" to the glory of God.

### *Lights in the Eucharistic life of the Church*

9. The work of the Synod has proceeded in an atmosphere of fraternal joy that has been nourished by the open discussion of various problems and the spontaneous sharing of the fruits of the Year of the Eucharist. The listening presence and the interventions of our Holy Father Benedict XVI have been an example for us all and a precious support. Many of the interventions have reported positive and joyful events, for example: the renewed consciousness of the importance of the Sunday Mass; the increase in the number of vocations to the priesthood and to consecrated life in various places of the world; the powerful experiences of the

World Youth Days, culminating at Cologne in Germany; the development of numerous initiatives for the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament almost everywhere in the world; the renewal of the catechesis on Baptism and the Eucharist in the light of the Catechism of the Catholic Church; the growth of movements and communities who form missionaries for the new evangelization; the growth in the number of young altar servers who bring with them the hope of new vocations, and many other events that cause us to give thanks.

Finally, the Synod Fathers hope that the Year of the Eucharist might be a beginning and a point of departure for a new evangelization of our globalized humanity, that begins with the Eucharist.

10. We wish that "Eucharistic wonder" (EE 6) might lead the faithful to an always stronger life of faith. To this end, the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic traditions celebrate the Divine Liturgy, cultivate the prayer of Jesus and the Eucharistic fast, while the Latin tradition fosters a "Eucharistic spirituality," that culminates in the celebration of the Eucharist. There is also the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament outside Mass, Eucharistic Benediction, processions with the Blessed Sacrament, and healthy manifestations of popular piety. Such spirituality will certainly prove to be a very rich resource in sustaining everyday life, and strengthening our witness.

11. We thank God that in many countries where priests were not present, or forced underground, the Church is now freely able to celebrate the Holy Mysteries. The freedom to preach the Gospel and witnesses with their renewed fervour

are reawakening the faith little by little, in areas profoundly dechristianized. We affectionately greet and encourage all those who continue to suffer persecution. We also ask that in those places where Christians are a minority group, they be allowed to celebrate the Day of the Lord in complete freedom.

### *Challenges for a Eucharistic Renewal*

12. The life of our Churches is also marked by shadows and problems which we have not ignored. In the first place, we think of the loss of the sense of sin and the persistent crisis in the practice of the Sacrament of Penance. It is important to rediscover its deepest meaning; it is a conversion and a precious remedy given by the risen Christ for the forgiveness of sins (see Jn 20:23) and for the growth of love towards him and our brothers and sisters.

It is interesting to notice, that more and more young people, suitably catechized, practice confessing their personal sins, so revealing an awareness of the reconciliation required for the worthy reception of Holy Communion.

13. Nevertheless, the lack of priests to celebrate the Sunday Eucharist worries us a great deal and invites us to pray and more actively promote priestly vocations. Some priests, undergoing great difficulty, are forced to celebrate many times and to move from one place to another to best meet the needs of the faithful. They truly deserve our deep appreciation and solidarity. Our thanks goes also to those many missionaries whose enthusiasm for the proclamation of the Good News enables us to remain faithful today to the

commandment of the Lord to go into the whole world and to baptize in his name (see Mt 28:19).

14. On the other hand, we are worried because the absence of the priest makes it impossible to celebrate Mass, to celebrate the Day of the Lord. Various forms of celebration already exist in different continents that suffer from a lack of priests. Yet, the practice of "spiritual communion," dear to the Catholic tradition, can and should be better promoted and explained so that the faithful may be helped both to communicate sacramentally in a better way and to bring genuine consolation to those who, for various reasons, cannot receive the Body and Blood of Christ in communion. We believe that this practice should help people who are alone, especially the handicapped, the aged, those imprisoned and refugees.

15. We know the sadness of those who do not have access to sacramental communion because of their family situations that do not conform to the commandment of the Lord (see Mt 19:3-9). Some divorced and remarried people sadly accept their inability to take sacramental communion and they make an offering of it to God. Others are not able to understand this restriction, and live with an internal frustration. We reaffirm that, while we do not endorse their choice (cf. CCC 2384), they are not excluded from the life of the Church. We ask that they participate in Sunday Mass and devote themselves assiduously to listening to the Word of God so that it might nourish their life of faith, of love and of conversion. We wish to tell them how close we are to them in prayer and pastoral concern. Together, let us ask the Lord to obey his will faithfully.



16. We have also observed that in certain areas there is a lessening of the sense of the sacred that affects not only the active and fruitful participation of the faithful at Mass, but also the manner in which the celebration takes place and the quality of the witness that Christians are called to give. We seek to revive, by means of the Holy Eucharist, the sense and joy of belonging to the Catholic community, as an increasing number of departures from the Church is evident in certain countries. The fact of de-Christianization calls for a better formation to Christian life in families so that sacramental practice is revitalized and genuinely expresses the content of the faith. We therefore invite parents, pastors and catechists to work toward re-establishing a strategy for evangelization and education in the faith at the beginning of this new millennium.

17. Before the Lord of history and the future of the world, the poor of every generation and today, the ever-increasing number of victims of injustice and all the forgotten of this world challenge us. They remind us of Christ's agony, until the end of the world. These sufferings cannot remain extraneous to the celebration of the Eucharistic Mystery which summons all of us to work for justice and the transformation of the world in an active and conscious fashion, on the basis of the social teaching of the Church that promotes the centrality and the dignity of the human person.

"We cannot delude ourselves: mutual love and especially the care that we show for those who are in need will indicate that we will be recognized as true disciples of Christ (see Jn 13:35; Mt 25:31-46). This is the criterion that will attest the

authenticity of our Eucharistic celebrations" (*Mane nobiscum Domine* 28).

*You will be my Witnesses*

18. "Jesus, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end". Saint John reveals the meaning of the Institution of the Holy Eucharist in the narrative of the washing of the feet (see Jn 13:1-20). Jesus humbles himself to wash the feet of his disciples as a sign of his love which reaches beyond all limits. This prophetic gesture proclaims his self-humiliation of the following day, unto death on the Cross; an action that takes away the sins of the world, and washes away every sin from our souls. The Holy Eucharist is the gift of love, an encounter with the God who loves us and a spring welling up to eternal life. Bishops, priests and deacons, we are the first witnesses and servants of this Love.

19. Dear Priests, we have thought of you a great deal over these days. We recognize your generosity and your challenges. You bear, in communion with us, the burden of the daily pastoral service of the People of God. You proclaim the Word of God, and you take care to introduce the faithful to the Eucharistic mystery. What a grace your ministry is! We pray with you and for you so that, together, we will remain faithful to the love of the Lord. We ask you to be, with us and following the example of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI, "humble workers in the vineyard of the Lord," following a consistent priestly life. May the peace of Christ that you give to repentant sinners and to the Eucharistic gatherings, flow down upon you and on the communities that live from your witness.

We remember with gratitude the commitment of the permanent deacons, catechists, pastoral workers and numerous lay people who work for the community. May your service always be fruitful and generous, nourished by a full unity of spirit and action with the Pastors of your communities!

20. Dearly beloved brothers and sisters, we are called, in whatever form of life we find ourselves, to live our baptismal vocation, clothing ourselves with the sentiments of Christ Jesus (see Phil 2:2), matching one another in humility, following the example of Christ Jesus. Our mutual love is not only an imitation of the Lord, it is a living proof of his life-giving presence among us. We greet and thank all consecrated people, that chosen portion of the vineyard of the Lord who freely witness to the Good News of the Spouse who is coming (see Rev 22:17-20). Your Eucharistic witness in the service of Christ is a cry of love in the darkness of the world, an echo of the ancient Marian hymns, the *Stabat Mater* and of the *Magnificat*. May the Woman of the Eucharist par excellence, crowned with stars, and rich in love, the Virgin of the Assumption and of the Immaculate Conception, watch over you in your service of God and the poor, in the joy of Easter, for the hope of the world.

21. Dear young people, the Holy Father Benedict XVI has repeatedly said that you lose nothing when you give yourselves to Christ. We take up again his strong and serene words from his inaugural Mass that direct you toward true happiness, with the greatest respect for your personal freedom: "Do not be afraid of Christ! He takes nothing away, and he gives you everything. When we give ourselves to him, we

receive a hundredfold in return. Yes, open, open wide the doors to Christ - and you will find true life". We have great trust in your capacity and your desire to develop the positive values in the world, and to change what is unjust and violent. Please count upon our support and our prayer so that we may together accept the challenge to build the future with Christ. You are the "sentinels of the morning" and the "explorers of the future." Do not fail to draw from the source of divine energy in the Holy Eucharist to bring about the changes that are necessary.

To all young seminarians who are preparing for the priestly ministry, and who share with their generation the same hopes for the future, we wish to express our hope that their formation will be permeated by an authentic Eucharistic spirituality.

22. Dear Christian married couples and your families, your vocation to holiness begins as the domestic Church, is nourished at the Holy Table of the Eucharist. Your faith in the Sacrament of Marriage transforms your nuptial union into a Temple of the Holy Spirit, into a rich source of new life, generating children, the fruit of your love. We have often spoken of you at the Synod because we are conscious of the fragility and the uncertainties of the world today. Remain strong in your struggle to educate your children in the faith. You are the source where vocations to the priesthood and the religious life are born. Do not forget that Christ dwells in your union; he blesses it with all the graces you need to live your vocation in a saintly way. We encourage you to maintain the practice of participating as a family in the Sunday Eucharist. In this way, you bring joy to the heart of

Jesus, who has said: "Let the little children come to me" (Mk 10:14).

23. We wish to address a special word to all the suffering, especially the sick and the handicapped, who are united with Christ's sacrifice through their suffering (see Rom 12:2). In your suffering of body and heart, you participate in a special way in the sacrifice of the Eucharist and you are privileged witnesses of the love which comes from it. We are certain that in the moment when we experience our own frailty and limitations, the strength of the Eucharist can be a great help. United to the Paschal Mystery of Christ, we find the answer to the anguish of suffering and death, especially when sickness strikes innocent children. We are close to you all, and especially close to those of you who are dying and who receive the Body of Christ as Viaticum for their final journey toward the Kingdom.

### ***That all may be One***

24. The Holy Father Benedict XVI has restated the solemn commitment of the Church to the cause of ecumenism. We are all responsible for this unity (see Jn 17:21), as we are all members of the family of God because of our Baptism, graced by the same fundamental dignity and sharing in the remarkable sacramental gift of divine life. We all feel the sadness of separation which prevents the common celebration of the Eucharist. We wish to intensify the prayer for unity within communities, the exchange of gifts between the Churches and ecclesial communities, as well as the respectful and fraternal contact among everyone, so that we may better

know and love one another, respecting and appreciating our differences and our shared values. The precise regulations of the Church determine the position we are to take on sharing the Eucharist with brothers and sisters who are not yet in full communion with us. A healthy discipline prevents confusion and imprudent gestures that might further damage true communion.

25. As Christians, we are close to the other descendants of Abraham: the Jews, who were the first to inherit the Covenant, and the Muslims. In celebrating the Holy Eucharist, we also believe that we are, in the words of Saint Augustine, "a sacrament of humanity" (De civ. Dei, 16), the voice of all the prayers and supplications that rise from the earth toward God.

***Conclusion: The Peace Full of Hope  
Beloved Brothers and Sisters,***

26. We thank God for this Eleventh Synodal Assembly which, convened forty years after the Second Vatican Council, has made us go back to the source of the mystery of the Church. We thus end the Year of the Eucharist on a high note, confirmed in unity and renewed in apostolic and missionary enthusiasm.

At the beginning of the fourth century, Christian worship was still forbidden by the Imperial authorities. The Christians of North Africa, committed to their celebration of the Day of the Lord, defied the prohibition. They were martyred, because they declared that they could not live without the Sunday

Eucharistic celebration. The 49 Martyrs of Abitene, united with so many saints and blessed who have made the Eucharist the center of their life, are praying for us at the beginning of this new millennium. They teach us faithfulness to the gathering of the New Covenant with the Risen Christ.

At the end of this Synod we experience that Peace full of hope that the disciples of Emmaus, with burning hearts, received from the Risen Lord. They arose and returned in haste to Jerusalem, to share their joy with their brothers and sisters in the faith. We hope that you will go joyfully to meet him in the Holy Eucharist, and that you will experience the truth of his words: "And I am with you until the end of the world" (Mt 28:20)

Beloved Brothers and Sisters, Peace be with you!

## ARTICLES

# The Journey of Lent

FAUSTO GOMEZ, OP

On Ash Wednesday, we Christians begin the journey of Lent, a journey that leads us to the glorious Easter.

The journey of Lent is a pilgrimage of conversion, penance and reconciliation. These three words express basically the same reality with different nuances in meaning. *What is conversion?*

### *Conversion*

Conversion signifies going back to God from sin, to make a sort of "U-Turn" from the road of sin to the road of God. Once I saw a bumper sticker that shouted at me with its big red letters: "If you are headed in the wrong direction, God allows U-Turns."

To be converted means to renounce sin. Sin is darkness, slavery. It makes the sinner old, while love renews, refreshes and rejuvenates. To be converted also means to return to God - to a life of grace and love. Conversion then



is "to die to death (sin) and to live to life (grace)" (St. Augustine).

Conversion is *metanoia*, which is change of mind and heart - holistic change. Metanoia implies change in being and in doing - radical conversion. It literally means change of mind, of mentality (Rom 12:2). It implies in a profound sense change of heart - of fundamental options, basic attitudes and actions. The heart, the seat of a person's moral make-up, becomes, through conversion, not a source of corruption (Mt 15:19), but of positive change and renewal (Rom 14:14-20).

Conversion is a continuing process. It is, therefore, *continuing conversion*. Continuing conversion implies putting on Christ - his attitudes, his virtues, his love - in an ever-deeper way (Rom 13:14; I Cor 5:7; Eph2:1 & ff).

Continuing conversion is a permanent Christian attitude and existential task (cf. Col 2:5-7), actualized and strengthened by prayer and meditation, the reception of the Sacraments, in particular the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

Jesus began his preaching thus: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mk 1:15): Be converted, repent, do penance! And the time is *now*, for tomorrow never comes!

Conversion is achieved with faith through penance. *What is penance?*

### *Penance*

I remember the words that Blessed Pope John XXIII wrote in his diary: "There are two paths to paradise: inno-

cence and penance." All believers, all Christians are asked by their faith to be converted, to be penitent and do penance.

Penance is a virtue or "habit of the heart," that is, a good operative habit or strong propensity that inclines us to be penitent, to do acts of penance. As a moral virtue, penance makes the penitent person and his/her acts good. It is a virtue connected with justice, which disposes us to give to each person his/her due, that is, his/her rights, to give to God what is due to him.

Penance is ordered to the destruction of sin as an offense against God. According to Vatican II, the real essence of the virtue of penance is hatred for sin as an offense against God. Penance is mainly interior penance, which is centered on *repentance*, as a firm disposition of the soul to renounce sin and return to God, as a permanent inclination to change our lives following the direction of Christ.

The ultimate goal of penance is "loving God and committing ourselves completely to him" (Paul VI). Penance is closely linked to the most important virtues of the believer, namely the theological virtues. According to theologian and Cardinal W. Kasper, faith is the soul of penance; hope is its dynamic force, and charity, its form. It is, above all, charity that gives life and value to penance - and to all other virtues. Grace-filled penance is an attitude of love as charity, that is, as love of God and neighbor.

Loving penance or penitent love is a deeply forgiving love. *Forgiveness* is the power to reject hatred and evil wishes from our hearts, and to hope and pray for those who

have offended us. There is a story of an old Sufi, who had a store and received many bad coins from his clients, but never complained or judged them. At the end of his life, he said to the Lord: "Please, dear God, do not judge me - I did not judge my neighbor -, and forgive me: I am a bad coin, too." And the Lord did not judge him and gave him eternal life.

Penance is expressed by penances. *What are these penances?*

### *Penances*

Interior penance inclines us to do external penances, which in turn strengthen our firm disposition to perform acts of penance. The classical penances are prayer, fasting and almsgiving. These penances help us reestablish and fortify our relationships with God through *prayer*, with ourselves through *fasting* and abstinence, and with others - particularly the poor - through *almsgiving*.

Through the journey of Lent, we try to improve our *prayer* life. We participate actively and devotedly in the Sunday Eucharist. We pray daily our prayers - the Rosary, the Angelus, etc - more attentively and intensely. We make some pauses of silence to feel the presence of God in our life. We increase, perhaps, our time of prayer and meditation: "Prayer is the royal road to heaven" (St. Teresa of Avila). "This is the glorious duty of man: to pray and to love. If you pray and love, that is where a man's happiness lies." "Our prayer is incense that gives God the greatest pleasure" (St. John Mary Vianney).

Through the forty days of Lent we practice *fasting*. Fasting is the symbol of our simple life and modest living. We try to control better our inordinate passions or longing for excessive food, drink, material things - and excessive cell-phone use! "The body under the spirit and the spirit under God!" (St. Augustine)

From Ash Wednesday to Holy Saturday, we try to share a bit more of what we have with those who do not have. *Almsgiving* is a sign of compassion towards the poor, the sick and the abandoned. "Let us live simply so that others might simply live" (Canadian Bishops).

Penance means forgiving and being compassionate. *Compassion* is the fruit of love that calls us to feel the sufferings of others as our own. Through Lent, this compassionate penance disposes us to be in solidarity with wounded humanity, in particular the poor and oppressed: "Give to the poor and you give to yourself (St. Peter Chrysologus).

Prayer leads to fasting, and prayer and fasting, to mercy. In a radical sense, penance - and penances - ought to lead us to do better what we ought to do as human beings, as Christians: basic penance - and authentic penances - leads us to greater fidelity to our vocation and mission. This fidelity is the most genuine penance through our whole life!

Saint John Chrysostom speaks powerfully of five paths of repentance: first path, condemnation of our sins; second, forgiveness of our neighbor's sins against us; third, prayer; fourth, almsgiving, and fifth, humility.

Lent, penance, penances - prayer, fasting, almsgiving and reconciliation! *What is reconciliation?*

## *The Sacrament of Penance*

*What is the kind of penance, of fasting that the Lord wants us to do?* The Lord answers us through his prophet Isaiah: "God wants a fast that breaks the fetters of injustice, that shares food with the hungry, that brings to your house the unsheltered needy, that clothes the man you see naked, and does not turn away from your own kin" (cf. Is 58:6-7).

"Atone for your sins by good deeds, and for your misdeeds by kindness to the poor; then your prosperity will be long" (Dan 4:24). *Atone for your sins!* We are sinners. Penance calls us to approach the Sacrament of Penance instituted by Christ, who said to his apostles: "Receive the Holy Spirit. For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained" (cf. Jn 20:22).

The virtue of penance and penances lead to *the Sacrament of Penance or Reconciliation*: The virtue of penance includes "the will to receive the Sacrament of the forgiveness of sins" (K. Rahner).

Reconciliation means to go back to conciliation, to harmony, to unity - to peace! In the Sacrament of Penance, we are reconciled with God, within ourselves, with others and with nature. The Sacrament of Penance is indeed the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

Our Mother Church asks from us to confess our grave sins at least once a year (Canon 989). She encourages us to approach the sacrament of Penance frequently. Like other Sacraments, the Sacrament of Penance when properly approached is a source of grace. It is a unique encounter

with the Lord in his Church, a strong *kairos* or moment of grace! In this Sacrament, God forgives our sins and helps us forgive the faults of others against us. It also aids us to forgive ourselves. Thomas Merton beautifully puts it: "In the Sacrament of Penance, one discovers God's mercy and becomes merciful."

Approaching the Sacrament of Reconciliation properly will direct us to a better celebration of the Eucharist - to which all Sacraments are ordered to listen to the Word of God, to receive communion and to offer ourselves as sacrifice for the salvation of the world.

### ***Through Lent to Easter***

The word Lent, we are told, derives from an old English word that means "springtime." On the other hand, the Latin word "*lente*" means going slowly. Hence, based on this double etymology, "Lent signals the onset of spring and invites us to slow down our pace, to gather our thoughts, as it were, to take stock of our lives, to begin once again to put things in their proper perspective" (Fr. Richard R McBrien).

Lent begins with Ash Wednesday. As we receive our ashes, we are reminded that indeed we are dust and into dust we shall return! We know we are dust: we are fragile; we are mortal. We know that we are also spiritual and therefore immortal, and that we are not just dust (our body) but ensouled dust (body-soul). We are, as the poet said, enamored dust (*polvo enamorado*): we love, and God loves us!

Through the spiritual journey of Lent we prepare - by purifying our minds and hearts - to celebrate properly the

great mysteries of our faith. We prepare - through conversion, penance and reconciliation - to accompany Jesus, the Crucified and Risen Lord, through his passion, death and resurrection. Thus we hope to realize in a deeper way that the way of the Cross is part of the way of Christ - the way of life to Life! "Through his death and resurrection Jesus turned sunset into sunrise" (St. Clement of Alexandria).

Jesus died for us - for you and me -, *what are we doing for him (and for our brothers and sisters) this Lent?*

Dear readers, have a good journey of Lent! And remember: *We are Easter people!*

May Mary, Our Lady and Our Mother, be with us on our pilgrimage of Lent to Easter!

# From Hamburger to Eucharist

TIMOTHY RADCLIFFE, O.P.

FORTY years ago, the Second Vatican Council was just beginning. On 6 December 1962, Cardinal Lercaro startled the council by talking of "The Church of the poor". On this same day Yves Congar noted in his diary that Christ's presence in the poor must be made the basis of the whole work of the council. We were on the edge of that extraordinary renewal of hope, summed up the opening words of the council document published three years later, *Gaudium et Spes*, Joy and Hope. This was the context of *Cafod's*\*\* birth in 1962. It now has a staff of 200, and last year raised £26m.

\*"From hamburger to Eucharist": was the theme of the December 2002 "Pope Paul VI Memorial Lecture" delivered by the former Master of the Dominican Order. The edited extracts were originally published in the *Tablet* magazine.

\*\*CAFOD (Catholic Agency for Overseas Development) is a major British Charity network that has been fighting Third World poverty since 1962. It is the English and Welsh arm of *Caritas Internationalis*.



Today there are still reasons for hope. The Soviet empire has fallen. Apartheid has crumbled. Some countries, such as China, are much wealthier. But poverty has increased even more. Forty years ago we could never have imagined the present crucifixion of most of sub-Saharan Africa: Aids, malaria, starvation, civil war, genocide, endemic violence. And we seem to be losing the political will to face these problems. *Gaudium et Spes*. Forty years later we may be more inclined to remember the words that follow, "*the grief and anguish of the people of our time*".

This is the context in which we celebrate the 40th birthday of Cafod. What difference can its mission make in the face of economic forces of such incredible strength? What effect can even millions of pounds' worth of aid make when trillions of pounds are circulating every day around the globe in search of a quick profit? We all know that for every pound of aid that goes to any so-called developing country, vastly more is paid back to us. Are these programmes any more than ways of soothing our consciences? Do they achieve anything? As one project worker in Rajasthan said, "*Why help trees to grow if the forest is consumed by fire?*" Or as the woman in a cartoon said when she saw starving children on television: "*This is awful. Pour me another gin and tonic.*"

But Cafod's mission embodies a strength that is greater than that of all the economic forces that sometimes appear to work for inequality. This is partly because of what is achieved materially by Cafod and its partners. Water flows

and people are fed. But Cafod's works are most powerful at a deeper level, through what they mean and say. For us as Christians, the real model of what it means to make and change the world is our God who speaks a word. Cafod shares in speaking that powerful word of God.

If you really wish to understand why Cafod's works bring hope, then you must look not only at what they do, but what they say. Human beings are made for meaning, and it is the gift of meaning that most deeply changes us.

In John's gospel Jesus performs a number of miracles. I shall focus on one particular sign of Jesus, which is the healing of the man born blind. The story describes a man *"whose neighbours"* saw him as a beggar. But Jesus never relates to him as a beggar and frees him from dependency. This is typical of the New Testament, which never treats people as beggars. When the lame man outside the Temple asks for alms, Peter says to him, *"Look at us ... I have no silver or gold, but I give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk"* (Acts 3:6). When Cafod took part earlier this year in the Southern Africa Appeal, some people proposed the usual sort of poster, of an emaciated child begging for food. But Cafod produced a poster that showed a woman striding forward with a child on her back. She is upright, dignified and strong. She is going somewhere. And is it on purpose that she is not shown coming towards us, as a beggar might, but going her own way? We may walk with her if we wish, but we do not tell her where to go.

The story of the man born blind shows Jesus completing God's creation of humanity. The man born blind was incomplete, half-made. Creation is not something that God did at the beginning, and which is over. It is the work of Jesus and our work, too. The mission of Cafod, and indeed all human striving after a just world, is more than bandaging the wounds of humanity. It is the completion of God's fashioning of a just world.

We change the world by building dams, constructing power stations, digging wells and producing goods. These are indeed the raw materials of human development. They are necessary, but not enough. All profound transformation occurs at the level of human meaning.

Human beings live and die by signs. The terrorists of 11 September understood this well. Thousands of people died, and tens of thousands were bereaved. But it was planned and executed as a symbolic event, which was far more destructive. The symbols of global travelling, jet planes, slammed into those icons of western economic and military power, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon. Those awful deeds spoke! All of us will be for ever marked by the images of that day.

Think of that student in Tiananmen Square, fragile and vulnerable in front of the tank, so easily crushed and yet so strong! That is a symbolic event which changed the world. Think of the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was far more than the demolition of an obstacle.

Cafod's projects are effective. No one would give them money to support the digging of wells if water never came out. But these programmes speak; they mean something, and it is thus that they are a sharing in God's creation of the world, and the bringing in of the Kingdom. They are sacramental.

Symbols make us and destroy us. I was in Cairo last April, and the prior took me to visit part of the city that is not often seen by tourists, Mukatam, the town of the rubbish collectors. It is the dirtiest, smelliest place I have ever seen, and 500,000 people live here, mostly Christians. They go out each morning on their little donkey carts to collect the rubbish and bring it back to their quarter, and to sort through it to see if anything can be recycled. On the cliffs behind the city, a Polish artist has painted vast images of Christ in glory: transfigured, resurrected and ascended into heaven. When they come back home they face these images of glory that tower over them. Then they remember that they are not ultimately the citizens of Mukatam but of the Kingdom, and they lift up their heads.

At the beginning of the story of the blind man, the disciples talk about him, but they do not speak to him. Only Jesus does. Then when he is cured the neighbours talk about him, but they say nothing to him until he speaks out and says, *"I am the man."* Then he is taken to the Pharisees and again they begin by talking about him rather than to him. The Pharisees summon his parents, but they refuse to talk about him. They say, *"He is of age; he will speak for himself"* And

he does so, ever more strongly, culminating in his confession of faith: *"Lord, I believe."*

It is the story of a man finding his own voice. He ceases to be the object of conversation and becomes a subject. Indeed it is his story. The first words he speaks, *"I am the man"*, are even more significant than they appear in English. He actually says in Greek *"Ego eimi"*, *"I am"*. He comes to be someone who can say "I am" in his own right. Now these words are often used in John's gospel to echo God's own name at the beginning of the story of the Exodus. God appears to Moses in the wilderness in a burning bush and proclaims his name, *"I am who I am"*. As God's children, we can speak with God and also say *"I am"*.

Cafod's programmes and projects bear hope above all because they serve the emergence of their partners as people in their own right, who have a voice, and who can say *"I am"*. They are not the objects of charity, but subjects whom we address and who address us. The liberation theologian Gustavo Gutierrez speaks of *"the irruption of the poor"*. They irrupt into the centre of the stage. This requires of us that we vacate that centre, that we are self-effacing, yielding the space.

The meaning of any project is not primarily the meaning that we give it. It is the meaning it has for our partners in the developing world. Once Caritas sponsored a project in India for the digging of wells. When the pump on one well broke down, the villagers did not repair it, although this

could easily have been done. When asked why not, they said, *"It is your well, it is not ours. How could we repair it, then?"* They **had** never owned that well.

**The blind man** takes a time to say **"I"**; at the end of the story, **he is able** to say "we".

**The Pharisees** say "we". **It** is the "we" of the religious authorities, **who hold** the centre of the stage and shut out people like the blind man. *"Give God the praise; we know that this man is a sinner"* (Jn 9:24). But this is a "we" that is challenged by the blind man. He grows in confidence and boldly asserts a new "we", with its own claim to authority. He says *"We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshipper of God, and does his will, God listens to him."*

God's creation of humanity is not ultimately the production of individuals. God brings to birth a community in which we can all say "we" and so flourish humanly. This is the Kingdom. It is only when we can say "we" that we shall understand what it means for any of us to say "I am". The deepest meaning of the projects and programmes of Cafod is in serving the emergence of this community in which, like the man born blind, we can discover who we are. Apart from each other, we are incomplete.

This new communion for which we labour is defined by more than mere geographical extension. It is a belonging together that is usually called "solidarity". Pope John Paul II

said, "The more globalised the market becomes, the more we must counterbalance it with a culture of solidarity that gives priority to the needs of the most vulnerable."

"Solidarity" is a word whose roots lie in early-nineteenth-century France. It meant the solidarity of the French against such enemies as the English. We Christians aspire to an unimaginable solidarity that is not against anyone. It is not based on exclusion, of an "us" against "them", like the "us" of the Pharisees which shuts out the man born blind. The Kingdom is solidarity without exclusion, offering us an identity beyond our present understanding. Until the Kingdom, we are incomplete people. It is not only the poor, the powerless and the voiceless who lack full identity. We do, too, until we are one with them. To accept to be called a Catholic is to accept identification *kath' holon*, according to the whole, the universal communion of the Kingdom. It is only in the "we" of the Kingdom that we shall each know what it means to say *"I am"*.

Perhaps the solidarity of the Kingdom can be expressed now in terms of liberation from the wrong sorts of connectedness. We all are caught up in networks of violence which are sustained by the export of arms and the import of drugs and prostitutes, and by terrorism. There is even the violence of the market itself. On 11 September we could see explode in our midst the latent violence that circulates in our global community. Part of the mission of Cafod is to co-operate in the liberation of people from this violent "we", in preparation for that peaceful communion which is the Kingdom.

We need signs of the Kingdom. Think of the difference between eating a hamburger and celebrating the Eucharist. Sociologists speak of the *"sacramental consumption"* of a McDonald's hamburger as the sign of one's belonging to the global world of consumers. As Peter Berger wrote, *"To paraphrase Freud, sometimes a hamburger is just a hamburger. But in other cases, the consumption of a hamburger, especially when it takes place under the golden icon of a McDonald's restaurant, is the visible sign of the real or imagined participation in global modernity."*

CONTRAST this hamburger with a Eucharist celebrated with a Hutu and a Tutsi Dominican brother in Burundi in the midst of the civil war. This is a meal which is sacramental, but in another sense. It is a communion that is signified by the sharing of what is given, not owned. It is not about joining the community of the rich and the powerful. It points to the transformation of all human relationships.

Some development programmes risk being sacramental only in the McDonald's sense, scattering fancy Western equipment, cars and computers and other signs of modernity. But Cafod's stress on partnership, on the dignity and the wisdom of their partners overseas, points to the Kingdom and to the completion of God's creation of humanity. They express our belief that ultimately we are one, and these people are part of who we are called to be.

Just before he was executed by the Nazis, that great Lutheran theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, sent a last message to his friend, George Bell, the Anglican Bishop of Chichester:



*"Tell him from me this is the end but also the beginning... Victory is certain."* Every work of Cafod is sacramental of that victory: every little triumph for human dignity, every small liberation of women. Every time a child soldier is freed from the army, every time famine is averted, every time the voiceless find a voice, then we see a sign of hope. All these small victories express our hope that *"our victory is certain"*. God's word has been spoken; it will be accomplished.

# **To Be Poor: The First Agenda for Ecclesial Reform**

**JOHN CONNELLY**

## ***PART I***

Father Timothy Radcliffe, former Master of the Dominicans, recently spoke about the question of poverty. He said, "Forty years ago, the Second Vatican Council was just beginning. On the 6<sup>th</sup> of December 1962, Cardinal LeCaro (from Bologna) startled the Council by talking of 'the Church of the poor'. On this same day Yves Congar (noted theologian from France who played a significant role in the Council) noted in his diary that Christ's presence in the poor must be made the basis of the whole work of the Council. We are on the edge of that extraordinary renewal of hope summed up in the opening words of the Council document published three years later, *Gaudium et Spes, Joy and Hope*. " (It's interesting that for the past forty years everybody refers to the council document *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World as Gaudium et Spes*, that is Joy and Hope.) It's interesting to note the complete first sentence of

this important document goes as follows: "The joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor and in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ."

Eleven days after the convening of the Council, the twenty-four hundred bishops issued an opening message which they entitled: *Message to Humanity*. They state to all the world their intentions: "In this assembly, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we wish to inquire how we ought to renew ourselves so that we may be found increasingly faithful to the Gospel of Christ. We shall take pains so to present to the men of this age God's truth in its integrity and purity that they may understand it and gladly assent to it." The bishops witnessed to a special concern for the poor. In this opening message, they state, "Coming together in unity for every nation under the sun we carry in our hearts the hardships, the bodily and mental distresses, the sorrows, longings and hopes of all the peoples entrusted to us. We urgently turn our thoughts to all the anxieties by which modern man is affected. (It's interesting to note that this message was approved and released on Saturday, October 20, 1962, just two days before the crisis over Soviet missiles in Cuba became public.) Hence, let our concern swiftly focus first of all on those who are especially lowly, poor and weak. Like Christ we should have pity on the multitude weighed down with hunger, misery and lack of knowledge. We want to fix a steady gaze on those who still lack the opportune help to achieve a way of life worthy of human beings."

We have just celebrated Christmas, an occasion to reflect on the question of poverty. God the Eternal Son took flesh

and was born of the Virgin Mary. He who from all eternity is equal to the Father and the Holy Spirit became equal to us in human history. Was he born into riches or into poverty? He chose parents who were poor yet perfected in virtue so that nobody would glory solely in nobility of flesh and wealth of parents. He led the life of a poor man that he might teach us how to use wisely the things of the world. He lived without honors that he might restrain us from seeking them inordinately. As Saint Thomas Aquinas writes - "If Christ had lived in wealth, power and great dignity, it could be believed that his doctrine and miracles had been received by reason of human ingenuity and favor. And so that the work might manifestly be of divine power, he chose what was abject and lowly in the world, a poor mother, a needy life, uneducated apostles and disciples; to be despised by the great men of the world and eventually to be condemned to death. In this way, he showed that the acceptance of his miracles and of his doctrine ought to be attributed to divine rather than human power."

What does the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* have to say about poverty? It describes poverty as "the condition of want experienced by those who are poor, whom Christ called 'blessed', and for whom he had a special love." (This sort of poverty is obviously not something good. All peoples have the right to nourishment and shelter and education and health care. This is the sort of poverty the Church seeks to oppose by working for justice and for solidarity, but as the Catechism points out elsewhere, God's kingdom belongs to the poor and lowly, which means those who have accepted it with humble

heart. Jesus is sent to preach the good news to the poor. He calls them blessed for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.)

The glossary continues its remarks on poverty and says - "Poverty is one of the three evangelical counsels whose public profession in the Church is a constitutive element of consecrated life." (This notion of poverty is not applicable to mothers and fathers and children in our families. They must earn their living, they must house their children, they seek to provide a good life for their children, they are concerned with saving money so as to help their children in their education through college and university. The Catechism explains - "Christ proposes the evangelical counsels, in their great variety to every disciple. The perfection of charity, to which all the faithful are called, entails for those who freely follow the call to the consecrated life the obligation of practicing chastity in celibacy for the sake of the Kingdom, poverty and obedience. It is *profession* of these counsels within a permanent state of life recognized by the Church, that characterizes the life consecrated to God.")

Finally, the glossary offers a third perspective on poverty. It speaks of poverty of spirit and says it signifies detachment from worldly things and voluntary humility. This last expression of poverty is what concerns us at this time, as we raise the question of poverty as the first item on our agenda for reform.

## *PART II*

We began to reflect on the question of poverty - the first subject we are reflecting upon in connection with our

Agenda For Reform. There is poverty which is destitution. This is something every Christian must oppose so that all peoples have a fair share in the good things of the world. Then there is poverty as one of the three evangelical counsels which involves the living of the consecrated life. Thirdly, there is poverty of spirit which signifies gospel detachment and voluntary humility. This is what we have in mind as we raise the question of poverty as the first item on our agenda for reform.

It's interesting to look back forty years to the beginning of the Council. Popes and bishops had said things with regard to a Church of service and a Church of poverty. Cardinal Gerlier of Lyons in France had this to say: "It is essential that the Church, which does not want to be rich, should be set free from the appearance of riches. The church must appear as she is: the Mother of the poor, whose first care it is to give the bread of body and the bread of the soul to her children, as John XXIII declared on 11 September, 1962: 'The Church is and wants to be the Church of the poor.' She must direct those who have the necessities of life to the work of providing for those who still lack them. As bishops, we must keep in the forefront of our Council's preoccupations the problem of preaching the Gospel to the poor, of the apostolate among the workers. The present Council must be the opportunity of asserting this."

Pope John XXIII specified this theme at the Council when he wrote: "Confronted by the underdeveloped countries, the Church presents herself as she is and wants to be: the Church of all men and women, and in particular the Church of the poor." This has not been our present experience this

past year and the London **Tablet** has expressed it, "**The Church has been battered and part of the reason is a secularist attack - often intemperate and sometimes self-righteous - against an organization which is perceived to have been hypocritical and against its authority figures who are seen as secretive and autocratic, concerned to protect their own clerical caste.**"

Our point of reference, when speaking of the Church as the sacramental or mystical body of Christ must always be the Lord Jesus himself in his historical existence among us. Saint Thomas Aquinas in Question 40 of his treatment on the mystery of Christ asks four interesting questions with regard to Christ's manner of life:

Whether Christ should have associated with men and women in an ordinary life or should he have led a solitary life?

Whether it was becoming that Christ should lead an austere life in this world?

Whether Christ should have led a life of poverty in this world?

Whether Christ conformed his conduct to the Law?

We have time and space here only for the third of these four questions. Thomas tells us, and gives several reasons, that it was fitting for Christ to lead a life of poverty in this world. First of all, the Lord Jesus came into this world to preach the gospel and to prepare men and women for the coming of God's kingdom. A preacher cannot fulfill this task

unless the preacher is wholly free from the cares of financial matters. Secondly, the Lord took upon himself the death of the body in order to bestow spiritual life on all of us. This is why he bore bodily poverty in order to enrich us spiritually. In other words, Christ assumed our humanity to repair our sinfulness. Therefore, Thomas tells us, it was necessary that Christ suffer and do those things according to his human nature which could offer a remedy for sin. Sin consists of clinging to this world's goods and leaving aside spiritual goods. It was fitting then that the Lord should show us by his lifestyle how we should deal with the goods of this world. Thus Christ chose parents who were poor, yet perfected in virtue, so that nobody would glory in the nobility of flesh and wealth of parents. He led the life of a poor man that he might teach us not to be attached to riches. He lived without honors that we might not seek honors inordinately.

The Church at Vatican Council II made it clear that the norm for the perfection of the Christian life is to be found in the imitation of Christ as expressed in the Gospels. This is why it was important to many bishops at the Council forty years ago, and remains important today, to contemplate Christ the Lord in his actual lifestyle, especially when we raise questions for reform, whether it's personal reform or ecclesial reform. As Cardinal Lienart of Lille in France mentioned at the beginning of the Council, "The Church must find again an aspect that has become a little blurred through the centuries: the look of poverty. Remembering that the apostles were no more than humble Galilean fishermen and that the Lord himself was pleased to live in poverty, the Church will strive to be more completely faithful to this ideal." While Yves Congar



writes in this context, "The premise of most urban Church work, it seems, is that in order for the Church to minister among the poor, the Church has to be rich, to have specially trained personnel, huge funds and many facilities to provide all sorts of goods for distribution and a whole battery of social services." Congar concludes his comment that the Church must be free to be poor in order to minister to the poor. Perhaps it could be put this way: mission does not come after charity; mission is charity.

### *PART III*

In the seventh chapter of Luke's Gospel, messengers came to Jesus from John the Baptist. Luke writes: The disciples of John told him about the many things Jesus was doing. John summoned two of his disciples and sent them to the Lord to ask - Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another? When the men came to him, they said - John the Baptist has sent us to you to ask - Are you the one who is to come or should we look for another? At that time, he cured many of their diseases, sufferings and evil spirits; he also granted sight to many who were blind. And he said to them in reply - Go and tell John what you have seen and heard. The blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news preached to them. These various signs are what are called the *messianic signs*. Jesus' reply is couched in the language of Isaiah the Prophet who indicated the sort of works the Messiah, the promised one, would accomplish

when at last he came. For our purposes in this series of columns, I would underscore the last one mentioned - preaching the gospel to the poor.

Who are the poor? A quick way to respond is this: read the Beatitudes that begin Matthew's Sermon on the Mount; read the Beatitudes that begin Luke's Sermon on the Plain. Luke says, Blessed are you who are poor. Luke would seem to be addressing the real economic and social conditions preaching at the time; the poor, the sick, the hungry, the satisfied, the outcasts, the socially acceptable. By contrast, Matthew tells us: Blessed are the poor in spirit. He seems to be emphasizing the religious and spiritual values of disciples for those who are members of God's Kingdom. Matthew would seem to indicate those in the Old Testament who were praised by being close to God, who were without much material possession but with abundant confidence in God. (In the current issue of *America* magazine, there is an interesting article on "The Church of the Poor". It concerns conditions in the huge diocese of Manila where half the population lives in dire poverty. The article is true also in similar situations in various African countries and in Latin American countries. These situations are quite particular and must be addressed in some new and radical ways. However, this is not what I have in mind in these bulletin notes when I talk about the question of poverty as an important element in what we are calling *Agenda for Reform*. Our concern in these columns is what the Catechism of the Catholic Church suggests under the rubrics of poverty.)

Paragraph 544 reads: Although everyone is called to enter the kingdom, it is important to note that the kingdom belongs to the poor and the lowly, which means those who have accepted it with humble hearts. Jesus is sent to preach good news to the poor. He declares them blessed. He refers to them as the "little ones". Jesus shares the life of the poor from the cradle to the cross. While Savior of all, he seems to identify himself with the poor. Paragraph 852 discusses the question of the Church's mission and quotes from the Second Vatican Council - "This mission continues and, in the course of history, unfolds the mission of Christ who was sent to evangelize the poor. This is why the Church, urged on by the Spirit of Christ, must walk the road Christ himself walked, a way of poverty and obedience, of service and self-sacrifice, even unto death." In paragraphs 2544 to 2547, the Catechism speaks about what it calls "poverty of heart". For example, all who follow Christ are to direct their affections rightly, lest they be hindered in their pursuit of perfect charity by the use of worldly things and by an adherence to riches which is contrary to the spirit of evangelical poverty. As we have mentioned, all who follow the Lord Jesus are called to poverty of heart. This applies differently to different members of Christ. We all know how difficult it is for the average family to own a home, take care of the material needs of the whole family, attend to the spiritual needs of the whole family, save money for the future education of their children. These are the ones who prove so generous to the works of the Church, especially to the works of their parish to which they give themselves and a generous portion of their resources. What has been said with reference to all who follow Christ is

especially pertinent to those who serve in the Church as bishops and priests. This will be our topic next time.

## ***PART IV***

In Luke's Gospel Chapter 12, someone said to Jesus - "Teacher, tell my brother to share the inheritance with me." The Lord replied - "Friend, who appointed me as your judge and arbitrator?" Then he said to the crowd - "Take care to guard against all greed, for though one may be rich, one's life does not consist of possessions." The Lord followed up on this story with a parable about the rich man who had a bountiful harvest. Not satisfied with his possessions, he wanted to build even larger barns so that he would have many good things stored up for many years - to rest, eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him - "You fool, this night your life will be demanded of you." The moral of this parable is, of course - "Thus it will be for the one who stores up treasure for himself but is not rich in what matters to God."

Previously, we meditated on the poverty of heart which the Lord Jesus enjoins on all his disciples. The precept of detachment from riches is obligatory for entrance into the Kingdom of heaven. Vatican II tells us - "All Christ's faithful are to direct their affections rightly, lest they be hindered in their pursuit of perfect charity by the use of worldly things and by an adherence to riches which is contrary to the spirit of evangelical poverty."

All this, of course, is particularly applicable to bishops and priests who serve Christ and His people in the Church's

ministerial priesthood. Canon 282 of the *Code of Canon Law* says to us - "Clerics are to foster simplicity of life and are to refrain from all things that have a semblance of vanity". Paragraph 17 of Vatican II's *Decree on the Ministry and Life of Priests* speaks directly to the poverty of spirit which must characterize bishops and priests. It speaks also directly of the simplicity of lifestyles the Church expects - and God expects - of bishops and priests. The following is but one possible quote from the teachings of Vatican II - "Priests are invited to embrace voluntary poverty by which they are more manifestly conformed to Christ and become eager in the sacred ministry. For Christ, though he was rich, became poor on account of us, that by his need we might become rich. And by their example, the Apostles witnessed that a free gift of God is to be freely given with the knowledge of how to sustain both abundance and need. A certain common use of goods, similar to the common possession of goods in the history of the primitive church, furnishes an excellent means of pastoral charity. By living this form of life, priests can laudably reduce to practice that spirit of poverty commended by Christ." This quotation, we could say, is very Lukan. It reflects how often Saint Luke in his gospel and in the Acts of the Apostles speaks of Jesus and the Apostles in their relationship to the poor. To offer one more quote from Vatican II - "Led by the spirit of the Lord, who anointed the Savior and sent Him to evangelize the poor, priests and also bishops should avoid everything which in any way could turn the poor away. **Before all other followers of Christ, let priests set aside every appearance of vanity in their possessions. Let them arrange their homes so that they might not**

**appear unapproachable to anyone, lest anyone, even the most humble, fear to visit them."**

Without protracting the subject at hand, it might be good to take a look at some elements from the Ordination Rites of Deacons (transient) and Priests. The bishop says to the priest candidate at the deaconal ceremony - "By your own free choice, you seek to enter the order of deacons. You shall exercise this ministry in the celibate state for celibacy is both a sign and motive of pastoral charity, and special source of spiritual fruitfulness in the world. By living in this state with total dedication, moved by a sincere love of Christ the Lord, you are consecrated to Him in a new and special way. By this consecration, you will adhere more easily to Christ with an undivided heart; you will be more freely at the service of God and mankind, and you will be more untrammelled in the ministry of Christian conversion and rebirth. By your life and character, you will give witness to your brothers and sisters in faith that God must be loved above all else, and that it is He whom you serve in others. Therefore, I ask you: in the presence of God and the Church, are you resolved, as a sign of your interior dedication to Christ, to remain celibate for the sake of the kingdom and in lifelong service to God and mankind?" The candidate answers - "I am." The bishop adds - "May the Lord help you to persevere in this commitment." The candidate answers - "Amen."

Finally, at the presentation of the gifts during the Rite of Priestly Ordination, the deacon assists the bishop in receiving the gifts of the people, he prepares the bread on the paten, and the wine and water in the chalice for the cele-

bration of Mass. He brings the paten and chalice to the bishop, who hands them to the new priest who kneels before him. The bishop says - "Accept from the holy people of God the gifts to be offered to Him. Know what you are doing, and imitate the mystery you celebrate: model your life on the mystery of the Lord's cross.

# **Homilies from the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time until 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent (February to March 2006)**

## **FIFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME\***

We do not have to feel the drudgery and anguish of Job to sense sometimes that our lives are without point or passion.

While disaster and depression might be rare for us, ennui and a lack of focus are not. And they are enough to bring us low. The causes can be many, yet often enough it is just simply a "managerial" attitude toward our lives, a "maintenance" frame of mind, that makes our feelings and faith go flat. We seriously misunderstand our faith if we see it in terms of getting by and getting through. If that is what it is all about, it has to become a frightful bore.

\*5th Sunday - 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time from *Homilies Alive* by Msgr. Francis Friedl and Ed MacAuley. E-mail: [ezedmac@sbcglobal.net](mailto:ezedmac@sbcglobal.net)



Perhaps at times our young people catch this. They sense a tedium, a staleness about our religion and our practices. "Mass is so boring," a young woman recently told me. Well, surely, she is not going to find much entertainment there - especially if you compare it to our fifty available channels and the razzmatazz of pop culture. And besides, why would one expect novelty and slickness from a sacred communal practice, the hallmarks of which are great tradition, universality, and stability of form?

But I also think my young friend is on to something. There is not much intensity or urgency in a community whose primary concerns are managing its relationship to God and maintaining its our existence. Is the church really about the powerful message of Christ, or is it just concerned with itself?

St. Paul, on the other hand, seems positively driven to write and speak of Jesus and his revelation. "I am under compulsion and have no choice. I am ruined if I do not preach it!" So much does his faith mean to him that he is willing to be the slave of all, to be all things to all people in order to win them over. For Paul, the faith is definitely not a matter of small consequence.

We, in contrast, seem hounded by doubt. Is it really that big a deal that people believe in Jesus? Does it matter very much to us if our children drift away from a faith we love? Isn't one religion just as good as another? And don't theologians themselves suggest that conversions, mission, and proselytism are passe, if not wrong-headed?

Well, if our faith is something that really does not make a very big difference, if it is actually not crucial that we or

others believe, no wonder it seems boring to some of our young. Anything we don't care much about can't be very interesting.

The things we do care about, however, we inevitably talk about. As another, very wise, young person put it: "If you love someone or something deeply enough, you want to tell others, you want to share it with others, you think they are missing something if they do not have it."

Paul's drivenness is as understandable as the lover's. Both turn almost desperately to declamation, poetry, or song.

If faith is real, it seeks expression. It will communicate and profess. It will have the energy of passion.

But faith cannot be real for us if it is not allowed into our real world. A Christ who is squeezed into a pew may feel cozy, but the relationship will soon tire and confine.

Could this be one of the reasons why the Gospel of Mark at the outset portrays our encounters with Christ over a broad range of life experiences?

We first find Jesus leaving the synagogue to enter into the midst of human intimacies - friends, community, and family. He walks and abides with comrade-apostles and their in-laws. There he is found. He inhabits relationship.

Second, he is never far from pain and diminishment. Grasping the hand of Simon's mother-in-law, he helps her up as her fever abates. Other people with afflictions, obsessions, and interior injuries call out for his touch and he responds. This was not his major work, of course, but he seemed always to have time for the marginal and the outsider.

Third, he is found in the "lonely place." Mark notes here that the desert is where he finds solitude. At other times, it is on the mountain. But as it is with his appearance in relationships and the wounded of the world, he maintains this dimension of quiet and prayer as a hallmark of his life.

The ground of the real world - our solitude, our relationships, and our human solidarity - is the terrain from which Jesus sets out to proclaim the good news and visit the synagogues of Galilee.

Our practice of faith, our discipleship, cannot be otherwise. Jesus not only transforms our secluded moments, our intimacies, and our social compassion. He lives there.

And his presence is a matter of supreme importance. For in our human solitude we find not isolated brokenness - we discover a citadel of relationship to God. Our friends are not diversions from a far-off deity; they give our life in God flesh and blood. The call of the wounded is not merely some problem to solve or avoid; it is an invitation to love's redemptive power.

The Eucharist reenacts this truth. And without this truth or its expression, we would be, like Paul if he were not to preach Christ, quite desperate.

## SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Our readings talk to us about leprosy. Our First Reading shows us that in Moses' time this sickness, and in reality all infectious skin diseases, were considered to be impure. Those who contracted these terrible sicknesses, especially leprosy, were considered to be impure under Jewish law. When a person was found to have this sickness the priest, following the procedures written in Jewish Law, ordered the sick person to withdraw from all contact with the community so that no one would be infected. When people with leprosy approached other members of the community, if their presence had not been noticed, they were to shout out, "unclean". In this way they warned others of their presence so that the others could withdraw from the area and not risk contagion.

To us this practice seems to be cruel since today we know that leprosy is curable. But Jewish laws were written to protect the people so that this sickness would not spread. For the good of the community, these laws forced the sick person to make a terrible sacrifice, withdrawing from the community and becoming a person who was shunned even by his or her own family.

Saint Mark, in our Gospel Reading, shows us a the kind and compassionate Jesus with whom we have all become familiar. The leper came close to Jesus thus showing his valor. We don't know exactly how he decided to do this since people with leprosy were not allowed to approach

other people. The sick man kneeled before Christ and simply said, "If you wish, you can make me clean." Jesus, seeing the faith that this man showed, answered, "I do will it. Be made clean." But Our Lord not only showed his mercy by curing the sick man. He also touched him, something that at that time was forbidden, since no one knew how contagious this disease really was.

Even though Jesus asked the man to tell no one about what had occurred, as soon as the sick man was cured, he went out and began to tell everyone about it. We understand this reaction. The man was expressing his happiness at seeing that he had been cured and he could not be silent about what had happened. He "spread the report abroad" and told everyone about what Jesus had done for him. The man probably was not even able to think about what he did. He could not believe what had happened. Because, as the Gospel tells us, the leprosy left him immediately and he was made clean.

Jesus wanted to go through this stage of his life with little public notice because he knew that this gave him more freedom to go about the towns of the region. However, this healing restricted his freedom and from this time forward he had to remain outside in deserted place. But, even so, people kept coming to him from everywhere.

Leprosy was, and continues to be, a terrible sickness. We, Christians, should look on sin as a spiritual sickness that is worse than leprosy for our souls. We all sin. Some people say, "I don't go to confession because I don't sin very much..." It almost always seems that people who say this

are precisely the ones who have a great need to examine their conscience, go to a priest and speak with him about sin and its consequences.

There are also people who store away sin in their souls for years because they do not like to confess their sins or because they think that they don't have to. And, what is really sad, is that many of these people continue to receive the Holy Eucharist as if it meant nothing to them. Fortunately, there are others who, when they sin, go to confession as soon as possible so as not to allow their sins to debilitate their souls as leprosy debilitates the body. We, Catholics, have the great gift of the Sacrament of Penance. Our Lord himself gave to the first priests, the apostles, the power to absolve sins when they "stand in for Christ," so to speak. And the apostles, when they chose their successors gave them these same powers. That is why Catholic priests continue to have this same power. All of us can be healed of our sins through the Sacrament of Penance, also called Confession. That is where the Lord, through the priest, cures us of all of our spiritual sicknesses.

Unfortunately, there are some people who do not go to confession frequently. Some do not even go at all. It is sad to see how they refuse to take part in the gift that the Lord himself gives to us: pardon and reconciliation.

We should learn from the man with leprosy who, kneeling before Christ, recognized that he was sick and needed to be cured of his sickness. We also need to be cured of our spiritual sicknesses. Our soul needs to be healed. If we continue to pile up mortal sin after mortal sin, we

will continue to be terribly sick. And we risk eternal condemnation.

Let us be truthful with ourselves, let us recognize that we are sinners and let us remember that we can be healed if we so wish it. The priests are waiting in the confessionals. They are ready and willing to show us the mercy of Christ. If we "make a good confession" we will surely feel as the man with leprosy felt after being cured: radiant with joy. And we will want to tell others, as he did, about the great good fortune and happiness that we have had when we experienced the healing power of Jesus Christ.

## SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

If you had the opportunity to begin your life all over again, is there anything that you would like to change - anything that you'd like to do differently? I think that it's safe to say that most of us would say 'yes' to that question. Unfortunately, all of us know that we can never turn back the clock. We can only go forward.

But, for those of us here today who would like to be able to go back and make some changes, especially those of us who would like to rid ourselves of some pain or heartache, Jesus has some good news for us. Jesus allows us to go forward in life and not drag behind us what seems to be an ever-growing list of sins and mistakes.

There is an old axiom about forgiveness that says, «Forgive and forget». Unfortunately, we, as humans, can forgive but we're not able to forget. It's impossible for us to forget the pain we've experienced through someone's thoughtlessness or anger or just plain malice. There's always a memory of the injury that was done to us-sort of like a skeleton in the closet. But, there's a big difference between our forgiveness and God's forgiveness. With God, there is no skeleton in the closet. God's forgiveness is total and without reserve. In fact, in today's 1st reading, God tells His people that He will remember our sins no more. It's not that God can't remember our offenses. It's that He chooses not to. That, my friends, is a miracle: that there can be, and is, a forgiveness so complete that not even the memory of



the offense remains. Jesus brings us complete forgiveness. The best we can do is «forgive and accept» our situations. Only God can forgive and forget. In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that He has «authority on Earth to forgive sins». He has entrusted this authority to His Church through our priests-through the Sacrament of Reconciliation. It's too bad that many of us see this sacrament as only «going to confession» - sort of like going to the dentist - a necessary evil.

But, the Sacrament of Reconciliation is so much more than that, isn't it? It's a personal encounter with the One who loves us beyond our wildest dreams. And, this encounter with Jesus is just like Him encountering the paralyzed man face-to-face.

We confess our sins to a priest and he pronounces us 'absolved' from our sins. In reality, however, it's Jesus who listens to our confession and our pledge to improve - our pledge not to let Him down again. He is the One who removes our guilt. He is the One who takes away our sins.

So often, we take this sacrament of God's forgiveness for granted. If we were fully aware of the depth of the Sacrament of Reconciliation (Confession), we might ask ourselves exactly what have we done to deserve this forgiveness. In actuality, there is absolutely nothing that we can do to «make up» for our sins. Only Jesus was able to pay the price of sin and He did that on the Cross. No, God's forgiveness is free - absolutely and completely free. But, it's certainly not cheap. It cost Jesus His life. That's why this sacrament is so necessary and so valuable.

Jesus offers us this costly but free gift of forgiveness out of love-not our love for Him, which is weak, intermittent and fickle. No, the source of our forgiveness is God's love for us, which is total, inerrant and eternal. And, how great is that?! How fortunate we are to be able to just turn every one of our sins over to God and be free of our fears and worries. How fortunate indeed.

When Jesus gives us His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, they are not rewards for 'services rendered'. Even after a good confession, we still have to say «Lord, I am not worthy...». No truer statement was ever made.

The Eucharist, like the Sacrament of Reconciliation, is God's medicine for us sick sinners. It's the food that can strengthen us on our daily journey to God-another day, another week, another month until finally our journey ends. As we meet God, we'll see that the sacraments will be no more. Then, we see our loving Lord - our Sacrament - face-to-face. Then, we will fully appreciate all that He has done for us out of love. Then, we'll know why He has given us so many gifts. Make a good confession. Do it. Believe me, you'll never regret it. Never. Thanks be to God. Thanks be to God, indeed.

## EIGHTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Today's Scripture readings from the Word of God are consoling and, at the same time, challenging. God's words to his people through the prophet Hosea and through his Son, Our Lord Jesus Christ, have a lot to say about what kind of a God he is. They also shed light on God's attitude toward his people.

The Chosen People of Israel lived surrounded by neighbors who believed in many different gods who had to be pleased in one way or another. They thought these gods were superior beings who caused them either prosperity or hardship. Many of Israel's pagan neighbors believed that at best, their gods could be persuaded to look favorably on them provided they gave them due honor and sacrifice. In other words, a way to avoid trouble was to be sure you were on the god's good side, which was usually gained by making some kind of sacrifice or other religious ritual. But that was the best possible scenario. These people also believed that at times the gods made it hard on them just for sport or for no reason at all. For Israel's pagan neighbors, the gods were not to be trifled with, even though they often trifled with humankind.

It's important to realize this background when we hear what the One, True God has to say to his people in today's first and third readings. In this light, the words God chose to use are even more amazing, and consoling. Hosea's message from the Lord of Israel is one of tenderness and love. God calls Israel his beloved bride. His love for Israel

is deep and faithful. This spousal imagery is strong and tender at the same time. As the Lord addresses his beloved he reaffirms his love and faithfulness toward her. "I will espouse you in *right*, in *justice*, in *love*, in *mercy*, and in *fidelity*." And God promises that Israel will know him. "Right" indicates that God's love is true, and recalls the original covenant he made at Mt. Sinai. "Just" means that he is true to his word. "Love" is a word that describes what holds a family together. "Mercy" recalls that he cares for and forgives the beloved with compassionate kindness. "Fidelity" is what a lasting marriage is built upon. In biblical language, "know" is the word for marital intimacy. God uses the language of marriage and family imagery quite deliberately, because it is the only human language that can come close to capturing the depth and faithfulness of his love for his people.

In today's Gospel reading Jesus, who is Emmanuel (God-with-us), calls himself "the bridegroom." He is telling us, the new Chosen People, that we are his beloved. He echoes the message spoken through Hosea. Throughout his earthly life, Jesus' words and actions of healing, forgiving, calling, and nourishing shows that he is the embodiment of his Father's love, truth, mercy, and faithfulness. We are the ones for whom he is willing to give everything, even if that means laying down his life to save ours. Our names are engraved on his heart. That is why St. Paul calls us to respond in kind and to write his name in our heart - in other words, to keep his life at the center of our life.

In a few days we will begin our journey through the Holy Season of Lent. Lent is a time for prayer, fasting, reflection,

and renewal. It is a time to look into our hearts, and to look back over the year that has passed since we last celebrated the mysteries of Our Lord's suffering, death, and resurrection. It is a time to turn back toward God if we have turned away, and to grow closer to him in areas where our love has been lacking. And when we do this, we remember that the words we heard in Hosea and in today's Gospel were not spoken by a bridegroom to his *new* bride. No, God spoke these words of love and consolation to a people who had turned away from him time and time again. That is why he says through Hosea, "she shall respond to me as she did in the days of her youth." That's why Jesus talks about "new cloth," and "new wineskins." Now is time to renew our response to our God. So I invite you to take some time in the next few days to think about the areas of your life where your relationship with God needs to be renewed. Where do I need to turn back to him? In what way does my life of faith need more truth, more mercy, more fidelity, more love?

When we come for our Ashes this coming Wednesday, we will hear words that remind us of our own mortality - words that invite us to "turn away from sin and believe the Gospel." This year, let us come for those Ashes with an awareness of where we need to turn away from sin, and where we need to give more time and energy to our relationship with God. Let us come with a real goal for the next forty days, and a desire to allow God to help us to grow closer to him. We can trust him to answer our prayer. After all, hasn't he told us that through his prophets, and through his Only Son? We *are* his beloved. He waits for us to turn to him. And when we do, He is always loving, faithful, and forgiving.

## **LENT, THE DISCOVERY OF LOVE**

**Columba Ryan, O.P.**

**First Sunday of Lent**

With the arrival of Lent people think of giving up little indulgences. It might be better if we thought of taking up new commitments.

The commitment we need to make above all is to love. To love our neighbour more, to love God more.

Easy words, but what do they mean? We can hardly love 'to order'; it's not like going into a shop to buy a ready-made suit. It's surely more like a mania, even an ecstasy, possessing us from outside.

That is certainly one kind of love, and lucky are those who are possessed by it. It is, alas, not likely to last, though it may grow into something deeper, tested and lasting to the end of life. Then it becomes more like the love I am speaking of, a love which is turned outwards, to the other.

Of course the ecstasy of love is itself taken up with another, but only to absorb him or her into oneself. The love I mean is more outgoing - the recognition that the other makes claims on us as 'other'; it accords to him or her the right to make demands. It is the recognition that I do not exist on my own, the discovery that I am dependent.

The love of God knows that we cannot answer for our own existence, that God is there, that he has claims on us. The love of neighbour is not much different; it means

again the discovery that we are not on our own, that we depend on others, and they on us. You might say that this love is the very opposite of arrogance.

We are told in today's Gospel:

The time has come and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News.

The Good News is that God has sent his Son into the world to die for us and rise to new life. To believe in that is to recognise that God's infinite self-giving love has become incarnate, has entered into our world, emptied of the arrogance we might have expected of God, and established the kingdom of God in our midst.

For that reason we are called to repentance, which means a complete reversal of the arrogance to which our self-love inclines, making way for God in all his otherness, for his claims on us, making way, in short, for love. That love acknowledges not only God's claim on us, but our neighbour's; we are not on our own, we belong to a whole community to whom God's saving love is extended. There is no love in isolation.

As we stand on the brink of war it is useful to remind ourselves that war is the ultimate arrogance, thinking that by violence we can overcome violence. True enough, our impaired humanity has to rely sometimes on force to counter the force practised by evil men. That is why civilised communities have police whose ultimate deterrent is force.

But this is in no way a solution; it signals the breakdown of humanity. Sooner or later the broken pieces have

to be mended if we are not to founder into total inhumanity. That is why the Pope has said

War is a defeat for humanity.

If we are led into war it will be for each one to decide that it is in fact the ultimate step, all negotiation failing. There is likely to be little agreement as present discord shows. Lent provides us with the opportunity of making sure that in our own lives there is no arrogance, that the love of God and of neighbour prevails.

Perhaps we have become altogether too materialist; our spiritual life needs refreshing - the need of prayer. Perhaps we have become too selfish - the need of helping others, by a real concern or by making contributions to the needy.

Lent is not to be a negative time. It may involve fasting or giving things up as a means of ridding ourselves of arrogance. But the end is the discovery of the pure joy of love.

*Fr. Columba Ryan is a member of St Dominic's Priory, London.*



## TRANSFIGURATIONS THIS LENT

Marcus Hodges, O.P.

Second Sunday of Lent

Can you imagine what sort of film the director Steven Spielberg would make about Jesus? With his love of special effects, we can be certain that he would make much of the miracles.

The Resurrection and Ascension would be right up his street. Above all, perhaps, the Transfiguration would surely be the most suited to Spielberg's cinematic penchant.

After all, this miracle story is stunningly dramatic: there is nothing of the quiet humility of the Christmas scene, nothing of the invisible majesty of the Resurrection. Only the Ascension surely comes close in sheer visible effect. Yet of all the episodes in Christ's life, the Transfiguration shows forth most obviously something very powerful indeed, in the transformation of Christ, in the appearance of the prophets, and wonderfully in the Voice from above.

So what a privilege this was for the disciples who were lucky enough to follow Jesus up the high mountain. For Peter, James and John there could be no doubting that something very vivid and impressive was at work in this miracle.

Yet is the purpose of the Transfiguration simply to stun the disciples into faith through a wonderful miraculous vision? Perhaps not! Indeed we need only to remember how weak the faith of the disciples remained after the Trans-

figuration to see that if that was its purpose, it didn't work terribly well.

Furthermore, if this were the purpose of this great miracle, we as modern disciples might feel a little bit cheated that we are expected to have a faith not strengthened by such a vision. Why can't we see Jesus transformed, for then surely would our faith be indomitable?

Well, probably not, as it happens. Indeed, Jesus himself taught, by extension and with staggering irony, that even if a man rose from the dead we would still find it hard to believe. So, to perceive the true purposes of the Transfiguration, as with all the miraculous signs of the Lord, we need to delve much deeper than the Spielberg special effects.

There is no doubt that the Gospel story of the Transfiguration is meant to teach us that the man who now turns towards his destiny in Jerusalem, his suffering and death upon the cross, is he who indeed enjoys the favour of God the Most High. In other words, whatever might follow in the story, there can be no sense in thinking that Jesus was in any way a failure.

He is after all the beloved of God himself. In this way, the miracle upon the mountain puts the story to follow, the Passion, into its proper context. And this is, no doubt, why we are given this reading in Lent, when we too are treading the path which will once more lead to our contemplation of the cross.

However, there is a further function of this great manifestation; for in the Transfiguration we see all too clearly

the great power of God to transform human nature. Clearly this Transfiguration is of Jesus, who is the Second Person of the Trinity; but we do well to remember that he was and is human also. And it is his humanity, his human body, his face after all, which was transfigured.

So if Jesus, through the power of God which is his by nature, can be transformed in this way, so too can we by adoption. And I believe that such transfigurations are taking place around us all the time.

Every day ordinary men and women are dramatically changed and transformed by the power of God. Of course, Spielberg might find it harder to make a film about these every day transfigurations, but that does not mean that they are any less real or any less exciting.

And Lent provides us all with a great opportunity to allow the grace of God to enter and transform us. In our Lenten disciplines, in prayer and almsgiving, in our fasting and self-denial, God, who is always closer to us than we are to ourselves, mysteriously draws even nearer.

So in this Lent we must allow ourselves to be transfigured by God, to hear Him say of us, his sons and daughters in Jesus Christ, «You, too, are my beloved children.»

*Fr. Marcus Hodges OP is a Catholic Chaplain the Royal Air Force.*

## **THE TEMPLE OF HIS BODY**

**Aidan Nichols, O.P.**

**Third Sunday of Lent**

The Liturgy of the Word today presents us with two partial but ultimately unsatisfactory ways of experiencing God. And by implication it contrasts these with the way we as Christians experience, or ought to experience, what God is like.

The first way is the way of the Ten Commandments, the Ten Supreme Words of the Jewish Law, which express the experience of God as a moral lawgiver.

We've all got consciences - a fact we recognise from time to time when it's not too drastically inconvenient. We're aware not just of how things have been and are in our lives but of what they ought to be. We have a sense not just of 'is' but of 'ought' - of obligation, ethical imperatives.

And somewhere in the depths of all that is God and a sense of God. Our personal moral world doesn't make up laws for itself. We receive the moral law; we don't make it up as we go along.

The ancient Jews thought this discovery wonderful. In giving the Law God in his love for Israel had revealed to her, more clearly than to any other nation, what the good life is like. Hence that lyrical outburst of Psalm 18 in praise of the Law: how perfect and trustworthy it is, more desirable than purest gold and sweeter than honey!

But unfortunately there's a big drawback if you focus your sense of God there in the Law. There is something very distant about lawgivers. Sometimes, maybe, we give a friend good advice, or get him or her to see something about right and wrong worth knowing. But it would be an odd sort of friendship that consisted in barking orders at somebody.

The second unsatisfactory way to focus our sense of God comes in the Gospel account of the Cleansing of the Temple.

The Jews weren't just moralists. As almost any of the Psalms shows, they were contemplatives as well. One main way in which they contemplated God was through his Temple presence in the holy city, Jerusalem. If you were feeling depressed and miserable and you wanted a shot of God's presence, you went on pilgrimage to the Hill of Zion.

I remember, and my soul melts within me;  
I am on my way to the wonderful Tent,  
to the house of God.

Not that God was confined within the Temple sanctuary. But the Temple was where he had chosen to put his Glory.

Once again, there are drawbacks to this way of experiencing God. The mystique of Jerusalem is a very moving thing in Judaism. If you go there today, you'll see the cemeteries of the Hasidim, the pious, on the westward slopes of the Mount of Olives - located there so that at the resurrection of the righteous they will be facing Jerusalem.

But the corollary is that for anywhere that isn't Jerusalem, it's hard chips. Not only that, but even Jerusalem won't do you any good unless you're a Jew first.

People think that Jesus cleansed the Temple mainly because of an objection to religious commerce. But the money-dealers were there to change Gentile money into Jewish, because even Gentile money jangling in your pocket would defile you if you entered the Temple. As for using it to buy your animals for the sacrifices, that was unthinkable.

What Jesus objected to was the way the Jews had narrowed, nationalised, true worship.

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.

Compare the Temple with St Peter's in Rome and you begin to get the point.

So finally, then, Jesus offers his own way to the experience of God.

Pull down this temple, and I will rebuild it in three days.

And, we are told, he 'was speaking of the temple of his body'.

First, then, Jesus' body is itself a sanctuary, since in his humanity - in his very bodiliness, indeed - Jesus is God and the Glory of God expressed for us. Because he shares our humanity, we can respond to God in the way that is least partial and unsatisfactory for human beings. We can respond to God as to our friend.

Secondly, Jesus envisages his own violent death in this body of his. But his murder is going to be an opportunity for fresh building. In his risen body Christ will be even more accessible as the place of God for us.

He will be set free by the Holy Spirit to communicate with people everywhere. He will reach out to touch them wherever they are - through, not least, his Church which is his mystical body, and his sacraments which are her mysteries.

*Fr. Aidan Nichols, a member of the Dominican Priory in Cambridge, is a well-known writer and theologian currently teaching in the USA.*

## WHAT GOD IS AS GREAT AS OUR GOD?

**Brendan Slevin, O.P.**

**Fourth Sunday of Lent**

Within each of us there is a longing which draws us beyond ourselves. We reach out to something that calls on us. There is a sense of belonging to something that is greater, something or someone which gives our lives meaning.

In our feeble attempts to identify what it is we crave to belong to we call it God, Jehovah, Allah, Yahweh. We believe that this Divine being created us for a purpose and in some way we are a reflection or image of the Divine. This God is our God and we are his people. We believe in this One God, the Creator of all that is good.

We are fortunate that we have sacred writings, Scriptures, which unfold for us some of the mystery of this God of ours. They tell us something of the relationship between our God and his people. The Scriptures are an indispensable part of our coming to know God.

But these holy books are not simple histories that can be read and understood as we would read the Fall and Rise of the Roman Empire. Mystery is not something that can be made simple; it is not something that can truly be comprehended. And here is where our search for the unknowable God, which we believe in, runs into difficulty.

There is a danger in reading Scripture in a literalistic way that was never intended. The very fact that these holy



books were written at a certain point in time places them within a different era of thought than our own. The easiest way to read Scripture is the fundamentalist approach.

I say this approach is easy because it is the unthinking approach to Scripture. It is also the facile way to read Scripture because we thereby limit the mystery of God to something we can comprehend. We confine the infinite within the limitations of the books we hold as holy. But the God we find is a God created in our image, not the God who is, was and will be.

In today's passage from the Gospel of John we come across a fascinating encounter between two teachers; or at least we come across the end of that encounter. In the preceding verses we eavesdrop on a private conversation between Nicodemus and Jesus.

In the darkness Nicodemus longs to understand what is behind the miracles that Jesus has worked. The darkness hides their conversation from those who would not understand. As a leading Pharisee it would be unwise for him to be seen with Jesus but as a searcher for the truth he takes this risk.

Jesus tries to explain to him the mystery as one teacher to another, but Nicodemus cannot fathom the secrets known only to him who has descended from above. How can he possibly understand that which is not of this world unless he believes in the testimony of the One who does know?

In what follows Jesus contrasts life and light with darkness and evil. It is in the darkness that two men meet but

it is in the search for enlightenment that Nicodemus has come. It is by being enlightened by God that we are raised up beyond the confines of our mortal state. It is only then that we can emerge from the darkness of ignorance and the hidden recesses of our lives where evil abounds.

The path we tread leads us from darkness to light, from evil and death to life. It leads us to a knowledge of the God who created us and raises us up from this life to the endless life.

But with this growing knowledge of God comes a growing self-awareness. This is the pain of rebirth as we allow ourselves to be transformed by God. This is the difficult road we are on, the road of uncertainty in the present.

This is the struggle between understanding the God in whose image we are created rather than confining God to the image we want to have of God. It is the difference between the God of the fundamentalist reduced to pages of a Sacred text and the God who raises us up beyond what our eyes can see and our ears can hear.

As we read through the passage from 2 Chronicles, many images may come into our minds in these days. But beware of taking the easy path. For God to be our God, we must first let God be God. Only then can we dare invoke his name and open ourselves up to his merciful judgement.

*Fr. Brendan Slevin is the Chaplain of the Strathclyde University in Glasgow.*

## THE SIGN OF ASHES

Fergus Kerr, O.P.

Ash Wednesday

Ashes are always significant. The remains of a camp fire in the woods; of a picnic; or of a bonfire. Signs of companionship; a family outing; a festive occasion. The remains of a bush fire, destroying many miles of forest, burning many animals to death, devastating many people's lives. Something even much more terrible: Lower Manhattan after 9/11. Even more terrible still: Auschwitz, Treblinka.

Ashes may be signs of happiness and laughter; ashes may be signs of terror and unspeakable sorrow. More personally, there are the ashes in the urn after cremation, to be scattered or interred in the family grave, the remains of someone dearly loved.

In 1930, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, a soldier in the First World War, confided this strangely prescient remark to his journal:

*"Out of the previous culture there will be heap of rubble and finally a heap of ashes; yet, over the ashes, spirits will hover."*

Wittgenstein had doubts about the way European civilization was going, but he could not have foreseen what was to happen. By 1938 he had to become a British subject so that he could visit Vienna without fear of being arrested as a Jew.

Ash Wednesday, *Dies Cinereum*, 'The Day of Ashes', dates at least from the eighth century. It's the day on which the faithful have their foreheads marked with ashes in the shape of a cross. It's the beginning of Lent, the forty days of fasting and abstinence, the traditional preparation for the annual celebration of Easter in the Catholic Church.

In the New Testament, and often in the Hebrew Bible, we hear of people who repent of their sins putting on sackcloth and sprinkling their heads with ashes. The symbolism is much deeper and more complex than we could define. Much deeper than merely symbolizing our need for repentance from our sins. Like all such ancient primitive ceremonies.

Originally, no doubt, this use of ashes to signify penance was a matter of private devotion; then part of the official rite for reconciling public sinners; then soon extended to all the faithful, in acknowledgement that we are all sinners. The ashes that we put on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday are the residue of the palms with which we celebrate the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the beginning of Holy Week.

The symbol of repentance rises out of the symbol with which the advent of the Saviour is acclaimed, the beginning of our re-enactment of the mystery of our passing with Christ from death to resurrection, our liberation from the grip of our old ways into the freedom of new life in Christ's Holy Spirit.

Year after year, as we receive the ashes on our foreheads, we remember that it is out of dust that we have come and that it is to dust that we shall return. It is in the sweat of our face

that we eat bread, till we return to the ground out of which we were taken (Genesis 3: 10). And yet, for all our mortality, for all our inclination to sin, for all the sorrow with which we are afflicted, the ashes are always there, the symbol of repentance, humility and conversion.

However terrible things are, (and in our time things have been very terrible) and are likely only to become worse, there is the unquenchable hope, in the rubble, in the ashes, of the continuing presence of the Spirit, of the hovering of the souls of those who have gone before us, of the blessed interceding for us, waiting to receive us into their company in communion with the Blessed Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

*Fr. Fergus Kerr is a member of the Dominican community in Edinburgh, where he teaches theology. He is the editor of New Blackfriars, the monthly review of the English Dominicans.*

## CANON LAW SECTION

# Cases and Inquiries

JAVIER GONZALEZ, O.P.

### I.

## MAY A MAN WHO HAS HAD A CHILD BE ORDAINED PRIEST?

### **QUESTION:**

*I am a teacher of Values (Religion) in a Catholic school. One of my students raised a question that has left me a bit perplexed. The question was whether a man who has had a child may be ordained priest. I understand that the generation of a child may not be an impediment, but my doubt is if the Code of Canon Law establishes any obligation on the natural father concerning his child's rearing or support. I find such obligation evident from a moral point of view, and hence I wonder if this is not an insurmountable obstacle to exercise the exclusivity and the freedom that priesthood demands. Could I have some clarification on the matter?*

ANSWER:

**1. May a man who has had a child be ordained priest?**

The answer, in general and as a matter of principle, is *yes*. The fact of having sired a child does not appear in the current legislation of the Church as an irregularity or impediment for the reception of the sacred Order of priesthood.

In fact, according to the Code of Canon Law, the following persons are irregular for the reception of orders (cf. canon 1041):

1. one who labors under some form of dementia or other psychic illness due to which he is judged unqualified to fulfill the ministry properly;
2. one who has committed the offense of apostasy, heresy or schism;
3. one who has attempted marriage, even only civilly, while either impeded personally from entering marriage by a matrimonial bond, sacred orders, or a perpetual vow of chastity, or with a woman bound by a valid marriage or restricted by the same type of vow;
4. one who has committed willful homicide or has actually procured an abortion, and all who have positively cooperated;
5. one who has gravely and maliciously mutilated himself or another, or who has attempted suicide;
6. one who has carried out an act of order which is reserved to those in the order of the episcopate or

priesthood, while himself either not possessing that order or being barred from its exercise by some declared or imposed canonical penalty.

To these we have to add those who are simply impeded from receiving Orders (cf. canon 1042), namely,

1. a man who has a wife, unless he is lawfully destined for the permanent diaconate;
2. a person who exercises an office or administration forbidden to clerics,... until he becomes free by having relinquished the office or administration and rendered the account;
3. a neophyte unless he has been proven sufficiently prepared in the judgment of the Ordinary.

As it can be seen, the fact of having begotten a child does not appear in the list of irregularities or impediments for a man to be ordained priest. Therefore, the possibility of such ordination exists. It is a different thing if one asks about its opportuneness or suitability which will always have to be decided by the ecclesiastical authorities, keeping in mind the concrete circumstances of each particular case. For instance, a seminarian who had a child during his years of preparation for the priesthood would obviously be expelled from the seminary and excluded from the reception of Orders. The case of a widower or of a bachelor who has had a son in the past but after having settled things, may be considering the possibility of becoming a priest, would be entirely different.



## **2. Does the Code of Canon Law establish any obligation on the father concerning his child's support?**

The Code of Canon Law mentions some obligations parents have toward their children, among them those related to their upbringing and education. But these obligations are found in the general context of the family and of the sacrament of marriage, not in the context of the sacrament of Orders. And the reason is not because such obligations may not exist in the latter context, but simply because such obligations pertain to the realm of natural law and *a fortiori* pertains to ecclesiastical law.

It is well known that, in normal circumstances, any child has the right to be born in the bosom of a stable family, that is to say, of parents rightfully married. Children have also the right to be the fruit of a pure conjugal love between husband and wife, and not the product of a flare of passion, of a birth-control failure or even of a crime (rape, incest). However, the mere fact of having engendered a child outside marriage does not necessarily oblige (morally or legally) the parents to get married. Actually, in some cases such a marriage would be impossible (for example, when there is an impediment, like if one of them is already married); and in other cases, the marriage, although possible, would not be the solution to the problem (for instance, when the parents are very young or when there is not genuine love between them). In those circumstances, forcing them to get married would only bring a bigger damage to the child and to the spouses.

Yet, what is always true is that both parents have the natural duty (generally established in the Family Code) of

providing their children with whatever is necessary for their upbringing and education. Nobody can exempt them from this duty. Therefore, when the marriage for whatever valid reasons cannot take place, there is need to look for other solutions to ensure the child's care, either by its single mother, or by some relatives, or by other people or institutions, or through the child's adoption by another family, etc. In some cases it may happen that the one in charge of upbringing the child may not be its natural father (although this would not excuse the latter in principle from his obligation of doing it, if necessary.)

### **3. Would the attention due to a son be an insurmountable obstacle for a man to exercise the exclusivity and freedom that priesthood demands?**

From what has been mentioned earlier, the attention due to a son (on the part of his father in this case) would not be always, absolutely speaking, an insurmountable obstacle to exercise the exclusivity and freedom that priesthood demands.

In the first place, matrimony and priesthood are neither theologically, morally nor legally incompatible with each other: Celibacy is a disciplinary measure adopted through the centuries by the Latin Catholic Church. Certainly it frees the priest from many occupations and concerns that make possible for him a full dedication to his ministerial functions. The married man, as Saint Paul writes, is worried about many materials concerns, while the celibate one can devote

himself freely to God's affairs. For that reason the Church holds in great esteem the charism of celibacy.

On the other hand, in order for a candidate to be ordained priest, he has to be free from natural obligations concerning other persons. The support of a son who depends personally on him for his survival (if the mother, for instance, has no job or material resources, or is rejected by her family, etc.) would be one of his primary responsibilities. Nobody in such a situation would be ordained priest, since such an obligation would mean a great handicap for the faithful discharge of his ministry.

But if the son's necessities for upbringing are sufficiently provided for and there are no major obstacles (either civil or canonical) that impede him from his future priestly ministry, a man who has had a child can be ordained priest. Naturally, the Church would previously require from him moral certainty about his freedom to receive and to carry out the sacrament of Orders, as well as the assurance that his past life will not be a possible cause of scandal or of bad reputation. In addition, on the part of the candidate, there must be the guarantee of a good preparation, right intention and a reasonable hope that the newly ordained priest will be faithful to his priestly vows. In any case, the ecclesiastical authority has the last word about his acceptance to the sacrament of Holy Orders.

## II.

### TEMPORARY PROFESSION AND EXCLAUSTRATION

#### QUESTION:

*I have been reading the provisions of the church's law on Religious and some questions come to my mind. For example, if a religious in temporary vows wants to leave his Religious Institute for one year before making the perpetual profession he can do it, cannot he? But if the period of time for which he made his profession expires during the time he is out, what is the best thing to do: to renew his vows in the place where he is? (I ask this because if he does not renew his vows he will be officially out of the Congregation, something he does not want; but is renewing his vows outside the Religious Institute not somehow incoherent?)*

*On the other hand, I ask myself, what are the obligations of an exclaustrated religious? Is he bound to wear his habit, to pray the divine office, etc. ?*

*Thank you very much for this service offered through the pages of the Boletin Ecclesiastico, which is doing so much good.*

#### ANSWER:

There are actually two different questions in this inquiry, both of which are related to "exclaustation" or temporary residence of a religious member outside his/her Congregation.

Such exclaustation is normally requested by the member himself/herself because of a grave reason and granted by the competent authority.

## **1. Renewal of vows outside the Institute?**

The first question refers to the situation of a temporary professed member of a religious institute who resides "outside" the Congregation at the moment when he is due for the renewal of his vows: *If the period of time for which he has made his profession expires during the time he is out of the institute, what is the best thing to do: to renew his vows in the place where he is? (I ask this because if he does not renew his vows he would be officially out of the Congregation, something he does not want; but is renewing his vows outside the institute not somehow incoherent?)*

The answer to this question has to be derived from common sense rather than from the Code of Canon Law. The Code, in dealing with exclaustation, speaks only of the exclaustation of perpetually professed members. The Code does not foresee any exclaustation for those in temporary vows.

Nothing in principle may prevent a temporary professed member of a religious institute to request residing for a certain period of time outside the Congregation, whether to think more deeply about his vocation (although this can be done much better within the bosom of the institute) or because of other reasons (health problems, caregiving to sick parents or relatives, etc.) What is obvious is the fact that if upon the expiration of the period of time for which the profession

was made the vows are not renewed, the member is disconnected completely from the Congregation.

Obviously, the situation mentioned in the above inquiry in which the temporary profession expired while the member is outside the Congregation is unusual, unless he is confined in a hospital or he has no intention of renewing the profession any more. The normal thing is that before this period expires, the religious had come back and seriously prepares himself for the renewal of profession, and is observed by his formators so they may judge rightly about his suitability to continue. The requirements for the renewal of profession or to perpetual profession are three, according to canon 657: (1) completion of the period of time for which the profession was made; (2) free request by the religious, and (3) attested suitability.

## **2. What are the rights and obligations of a religious while on exclaustation?**

The second question is about the "rights and obligations" of a religious during his exclaustation period: *What are the obligations of an exclaustated religious? Is he bound to wear his habit, to pray the divine office, etc.?* Since the question did not indicate whether the religious is a priest or not, I answer in a more comprehensive fashion.

The religious who, undergoing a period of exclaustation, resides outside the institute with permission from his superiors continues being a member of the Congregation and therefore remains subject to the obligations of his religious state, specially concerning the vows. The Church, with great

realism and maternal solicitude, says: "*Members who are exclaustreated are considered as dispensed from those obligations which are incompatible with their new condition of life. They remain dependent on and under the care of their Superiors and, particularly in the case of a cleric, of the local Ordinary. They may wear the religious habit, unless the indult specifies otherwise, but they lack active and passive voice.*" (canon 687).

Accordingly, the following are his rights and obligations, among others:

a) *Freedom from those obligations which are incompatible with his new condition of life.* For instance, fraternal life in common, cloister, regular observances, daily permissions, etc. The obligations that are "compatible" with his new condition of life are, for instance, the observance of the vows (although the manner of living poverty and obedience must be adjusted to the new situation), a poor and simple life-style, the praying of the divine office, the celebration of the Mass if he is a priest, etc.

b) *Dependence on and care of his Superiors and local Ordinary, especially in the case of a cleric.* By "Superiors" we understand either the supreme Moderator, the Provincial or the local Superior. The dependence is real, to the point that the Superiors may intervene in the life of the exclaustreated religious when they judge it convenient or necessary, inasmuch as they have to take care of, and be answerable for, his behavior.

c) *Wearing of the habit.* In previous times the exclaustreated religious was prevented from wearing the habit;

nowadays the situation is different and the religious may wear his habit "unless the indult specifies otherwise." In other words, the Superiors can prohibit a religious living outside to wear the habit of the Congregation if they deem it opportune. But in that case, the prohibition has to appear in the indult or written permission. If nothing is specified on the habit, the Superiors cannot prevent the exclaustated religious from wearing it.

d) *Deprivation of active and passive voice.* The deprivation of active and passive voice (i.e. of voting and of being voted in elections) is a peculiar juridical effect of the exclaustation. Such deprivation must not be considered as a punishment, but rather as something logical, since the exclaustated member does not fully participate in the life of his Congregation. It can be said that such rights are suspended. In this way, the religious is freer to reflect on the causes that lead him to request exit from the Institute. Obviously, the prohibition is valid only during the time he is outside; once the period of exclaustation is over, the religious recovers both voices.

There are some other questions related to the rights and obligations of the exclaustated religious. For instance,

1. *Who pays for his expenses during the exclaustation period?* This should already be determined in the rescript or indult of exclaustation. In this way both parties (the institute and the individual) could fulfill better their mutual obligations. If nothing has been written, the following rules may serve as practical guidelines:



- a) The member is, in principle, obliged to support himself (a simple life-style is required by the vow of poverty);
- b) Whatever the exclaustated member earns belongs to the Institute, but he must first provide for himself.
- c) If the exclaustated member cannot provide for himself a decent living, the institute should assist him.
- d) The Religious Institute is obliged to support the member on imposed exclaustation if circumstances so warrant.
- e) A cleric on imposed exclaustation must find a bishop who will accept him into the diocese.

2. *May an exclaustated religious be readmitted before the expiration of the exclaustation period?* The answer is yes, but subject to the Superior's discretion. In such a case, the Superior General should require the religious to cancel the indult so as to preclude instability.

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