

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

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EDITORIAL

I. Too Few Filipino Cardinals!

When the appointment of His Eminence Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales was announced, the Philippine Church rejoiced. Archbishop Rosales is a person imbued with solid spirituality. He abhors politicking, and is completely consumed by his advocacy for the poor. He hopes to translate the PCP II ideal of *Church of the Poor* into reality. Although it started as a fund-raising project for the poor, his innovative "Pondo ng Pinoy" crusade has since evolved into a potent instrument to conscientize people about the value of the "crumbs", self-help, and community solidarity. The project reflects the personality of Cardinal Rosales who believes that "small deeds done are better than great things planned."

His first reaction to his appointment as Cardinal was: "I say to you that this added task or responsibility or work will not be an honor but would mean greater service, so that the many poor around us, so neglected by the powerful, may be attended to, recognized, loved and served."

We are thankful for having a new Cardinal in the person of Archbishop Rosales. But we cannot help asking why there are too few Cardinals for such a hugely populated Catholic country like the Philippines.

With the induction of new Asian Cardinals last March 24, there are, at present, 20 Asian Cardinals distributed as follows: 5 Cardinals in India; 3 in the Philippines, 2 each in Japan, Korea and Vietnam, and 1 each in Hong Kong, Indonesia, Lebanon, Syria, Taiwan and Thailand.

Compare that to 49 Cardinals in the Americas and 92 Cardinals in Europe!

The Philippines, with its 71.1 million Catholics, has only 3 Cardinals, one of whom is retired and permanently residing in Rome. This means that, at present, there is only 1 active Filipino Cardinal for every 35 million Filipino Catholics. The disproportion is more pronounced when comparisons are made. In Europe, there is 1 Cardinal for every 3 million Catholics; in the Americas, 1 Cardinal for every 12 million Catholics.

The last Filipino elevated to Cardinal, prior to the installation of His Eminence Gaudencio Cardinal Rosales on March 24, 2006, was His Eminence Jose Cardinal Sanchez who was installed on June 28, 1991 at the age of 71. Cardinal Rosales himself is already 73 years old. There was a time when Filipinos were installed Cardinal when still relatively young. The late Jaime Cardinal Sin was appointed Cardinal at the age of 48, while His Eminence Ricardo Cardinal Vidal received the red biretta at the age of 54.

The Code of Canon Law provides that only those men who are "especially outstanding for their doctrine, morals, piety, and prudence in actions" (Canon 351) are appointed by

the Pope as Cardinals. Surely, this does not mean that only Filipino bishops who are 70 and above possess those traits.

II. What to Tell Your Parishioners *(about the Da Vinci Code)*

Bashing the Catholic Church has become fashionable and profitable these days. When Sinead O'Connor tore a picture of Pope John Paul II on *Saturday Night Live*, back in 1993, she became an overnight sensation. Those who complained about such irreverence were branded as intolerant, tyrannical, and religious bigots.

In this age of "political correctness" when a person finds himself hounded by the media because of "inappropriate language", it is ironic that hardly a sneer is raised by various Philippine media firms when someone bashes the Catholic Church and its most sacred teachings. In fact, the media helps him to become rich and famous. Don't get me wrong. I am not against all critiques of the Church. While sometimes biased and inflated, such criticisms render an important service, especially to us Catholics who too easily exchange our precious heritage for a mess of pottage.

Having admitted that, something else needs to be said. Many of the modern-day bashing of the Catholic Church and its teachings come from people who find a wicked delight in inventing their own version of such teachings, and making it sell. They prove their point through selective evidence, presented as though these were ground-breaking discoveries. In truth, most of these so-called evidences are a re-hashing of private fantasies concocted by earlier fiction writers.

Take the case of the best-selling *The Da Vinci Code* by Dan Brown. At first glance, the book appears to be a spectacular expose of the Catholic Church's best kept secrets. To the more discerning, however, the book is nothing but a fast-paced movie script based on earlier works like William Phipp's *Was Jesus Married?* published in 1970, Barbara Thiering's *Jesus the Man* published in 1993, and *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* written by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh and Henry Lincoln, published in 1983.

Of the three, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, goes furthest in exploring Mary Magdalene's relationship with Jesus. According to the authors, Mary Magdalene was married to Jesus and settled in the South of France after the Crucifixion. Since she bore in her womb Christ's child, she was, according to the authors, deserving of the title "Holy Grail" (a container of Christ's blood to be passed on to his descendants). The holder of Mary Magdalene's secret is the Priory of Sion, the shadowy but ever present group poised to create a unified state of Europe with a descendant of Christ and Mary Magdalene on its throne.

The main idea of *The Da Vinci Code* is actually lifted from *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, to which Dan Brown added a bit of science, occult, hermeneutics, feminist talk, and murder.

It is unfortunate that many people gobble up *The Da Vinci Code* as if it were historical or factual. They probably find in it new ammunition with which to demolish a Church they despise, or a means to forward a cause or ideology.

But a recent review of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* states: "*This is one of the more bizarre manifestations of the late-*

*twentieth century popular interest on the story of Christ with a twist of conspiracy theory. The authors breathlessly bend to their purpose whatever information comes their way, and the book offers no new insights into the historical figure of Mary Magdalene, but concentrates on trying to assemble proof for some of the more-far-fetched of the legends which have accumulated around her over the centuries. " Take that from Susan Haskins, a profound feminist and writer. Her comments could very well apply, too, to *The Da Vinci Code*.*

In this issue we also feature *Crash Goes the Da Vinci Code* by the eminent Dr. Ron Rhodes. It is, so far, the most comprehensive debunking of Dan Brown's fallacies. He reveals and refutes the distortions found in Brown's book, but without personally attacking the latter. Parish priests will do well to read Dr. Rhodes' critique of *The Da Vinci Code* if they want to banish forever the confusion sowed by Dan Brown in the minds of Catholics.

THE EDITOR

FEATURES

Spirituality of the "Crumbs"*

tGAUDENCIO B. ROSALES, DD

What is Pondo ng Pinoy?

The Situation

Today Manila has more than half of its population as poor (52% to be exact). The Makati, Mandaluyong and Ortigas skylines and the many condominium complexes around may not have the intention to deceive, but they certainly conceal the true state of life for more than one-half of the country's people. The GDPs and GNPs do not tell the true picture and stories of our less fortunate brothers and sisters. These economic indicators always speak of averages. The poor cannot eat economic product "averages" no matter how well they are prepared. All told the unassailable story of the Philippine economy is revealed daily at the meal plates (if they still use

*Homily of Archbishop Gaudencio B. Rosales, during the launching of Pondo ng Pinoy Community Foundation, Inc. at Folk Arts Theater, Roxas Boulevard, Pasay City, 11 June 2004, 9:00 a.m.

plates) of families in the slums, shacks, cardboard homes and makeshift sheds you see in Metro Manila (and under Metro Manila bridges).

The majority of the poorest families among our poor survive on less than \$1.00 a day for food (PhP52.00 a day).

Do I still need to tell you where the poor are? They live mostly in Baseco, Smokey Mountain, Payatas, along esteros, in shacks built along and against the walls, fences, along rivers, under the bridges and along the railways. (Pinagkakawartahan ng mga iyang "along the riles", sila pa ang bida). By the way there are nearly one million people living along both sides of the railroad tracks from Tutuban-Kalookan to Sampaloc-Balibisan-Balibisan-Paco-Makati, Magallanes, Alabang to the boundaries of the Rizal-Laguna provinces.

The national socio-economic profile is worse than the Metro Manila figure. Independent surveys (done by ICSI, Ateneo de Manila University, Assisi Foundation, Pulse Asia, UST Socio-Economic Research Center) all show in the national survey results that 63% of the Filipinos are poor.

The Disadvantage

The 2001 World Bank (WB)-International Monetary Fund (IMF) study on Combating Corruption in the Philippines revealed that ca. 40% of the annual budget of the Republic of the Philippines are lost to graft practices and corruption. Our country is one unique country in the world where candidates will spend tens to hundreds of millions of pesos for a position that pays only a few tens of thousands of pesos. "Your country is the only one in the world where a family and its descendants

actively stay in and control a city, town, district, province and region for two continuous generations and still claimed "aggrieved" when replaced in a democratic selection." This is the only place in the world where no one, since the time of Manuel L. Quezon, (who claimed preference for a "political hell with Filipinos" rather than "a political heaven with non-Filipinos") has lost an election. In this country nearly every election loser claimed she/he was "cheated".

Our protected political system is such where families and interest groups hold on to government positions like it was theirs by right, by inheritance, as a domain or a dynasty.

In 1998 and 1999, the Economic Intelligence Unit made the survey on critical problems of large corporation investment and operation in the Philippines and it identified the lack of proper infrastructure as the main disadvantage to development investment. The 2000 study of the same EIU revealed that corruption, cronyism, ethics, transparency and governance as the most glaring weaknesses in the Republic of the Philippines.

"What has happened to the Philippines?" our neighbors in Asia are asking. And do you think our national and local politicians can answer that? No! How do you explain the regression, the corruption, repression in the country? The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines in a studied reflection and exhortation on Philippine politics has the answer. "There is one main reason: Philippine politics - the way it is practiced - has been most hurtful of us as a people. It is possibly the biggest bane in our life as a nation and the most pernicious obstacle to our achieving full human deve-

lopment." (Pastoral Exhortation on Philippine Politics, Sept. 1997).

Our politics is so full of self, ambition, pride and greed. Mahatma Gandhi once said that the world has everything for everyone's need but not for one man's greed. Our Lord Jesus Christ counseled a friend "Watch and be on your guard against greed of any kind." (Luke 12:15). Philippine politics is so full of selfish ambition and greed and the obvious results are what today the country has harvested - corruption with an economic catastrophe.

The consequence of the country's present political ethos is now all too evident in the much damaged Philippine economy. The sad turn of such a political confusion is such that the disvalues it created in the economy are now slowly eating its way to the heart of our once rich culture. The devil knowing nothing of goodness thought it was only grabbing your money and your vote, but it really had both his hands on your soul. They are robbing the Filipino people of their Psyche - the Filipino soul.

Where have we been?

In the past we always claimed that we have suffered from centuries of misrule. We had our favorite "whipping boys" then.

But the greatest misrule in this country is the tyranny done to us by our own leaders, our blood brothers. Where have we been? They tried martial law; they tried dictatorship; the supporters of the same are still with us. We came from two EDSAs and a half. They tried more than half a dozen

Coup d'Etat, several more political and military adventurism, the leaders and fomenters of which are still with us. We had the once-in-a-lifetime experience of an impeachment for an immoral leader and countless series of investigations, etc., etc. Political and military adventurisms are perpetual scarecrows to foreign investments, development programs, tourist's visits and vacations.

The country needs people who seek what is truly good for its citizens without being blinded by narrow selfish ambitions. We call these people statesmen. And when we say we need people with that selfless perspective and longing only for what is the good of the whole man and of every man, we mean YOU ... and not the politicians!

We are going to move towards the full development of our brothers and sisters, especially the poor who now make up the majority of the Filipinos in our country. The poor can no longer afford another misadventure of any kind by any group. Money and resources had been wasted in the past. They had thrown away our reputation and name. Now they are even wasting precious time.

We will no longer allow the poor in our midst to be used or taken advantage of (Ang dukha kapag may eleksyon inaakit; pag may "rally" ginagamit). In the Gospel of Jesus Christ the poor, the lame, the beggar, were not objects. They are rather subjects, like Lazarus in everyone's front yard or door, who, through the power of the Gospel, will help "to affect and upset criteria of judgment, determining values, sources of inspiration and styles of life that are contrary to the Word of God and His plan of salvation." (EN, 18).

Where are we going?

We are headed for the development of every Filipino, but starting with the very poor. And we will use only the true ways available to us who believe in and accept the goodness and love of God, our Father, as He shared this with us in Jesus, His Son with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Love will be the one motivation we have. Compassion is the only influence we will use. You and I will be surprised at what love of God will do in us and among us.

We will call this from now on, THE THEOLOGY OF THE CRUMBS. It is about a miracle, a wonder of God's love that begins with the small. The Lord Jesus once told the story that a very rich man feasted on good food every-day, while a poor beggar whose leg wounds were licked by dogs, lay by the door waiting only for crumbs to fall from the rich man's table. The poor man died and was brought to Heaven, Abraham's bosom; the rich man also died and was sent to Hades (Hell). (Luke 1:19-31). Take note that the rich man was not sent to Hell because he was rich. He was condemned because he did not allow even a small thing such as a "crumb" to fall in the way of Lazarus. Selfishness and greed (no matter how it is expressed) is what keep Hell going.

What was the issue?

Lazarus, the beggar, was not asking to be seated with the rich; neither was he asking for the food of the wealthy man. The question here is neither of wealth nor of position. The poor was only asking for crumbs, useless scraps that fell

from the rich man's table of daily living. When the quarrel is over millions and billions, the stake is for the devil; but when the issue is about crumbs and morsels the obvious destiny is heaven as the saying goes *"Ano mang magaling, kahit maliit, basta't malimit ay patungong langit."*

How true to the Lord's teaching on littleness as the beginning steps to the Kingdom of heaven. Feeding the poor and providing for the needs of the disadvantaged will begin with as little as crumbs we gather everyday.

We have already weighed a crumb and its value is 25 centavos. Every Filipino believer in the goodness and love of God, as expressed in Jesus His Son, will set aside "a crumb", 25 centavos everyday. An educational component, called catechesis, will always accompany the witnessing to the values of Pondo ng Pinoy. No one gives more than one peso a day. (Of course for others, crumbs can be relative in size or value.) The practice will make love and compassion a way of life.

Pondo ng Pinoy is about the love of God lived by us. It is about the littleness in the expression of the love of God in behalf of our brothers and sisters. It will involve all of us - rich and poor, strong and weak, young and old, educated or untutored, priests, bishops, religious, brothers, sisters, the laity, teachers, students, anyone - who accept the love and goodness of God in His Son Jesus.

Pondo ng Pinoy is for all.

PONDO ng PINOY will be registered at SEC as a *community foundation* whose resources will support and maintain

the development and charitable programs for the poor and needy.

The Church is the initiator. The Church is the motivator. The Church is the steward.

But again do not be deluded into thinking that PnP is merely a resource enhancing movement. It is an evangelization tool and a development process. Through its catechesis, Pondo ng Pinoy is slowly going to clarify the person's vision and it will set an aim in life. Our Lord Jesus Christ calls that life he wanted to give us as "fullness of life." (John 10:10). The Church calls this now as "integral evangelization". Through the love of God and the poor Pondo ng Pinoy will help purify one's values. Participated in collectively, a community of believing citizens will slowly transform to a community of a "built up" people who belong to the Father's Kingdom and not just to an uncaring nation.

Make sure that daily every Filipino will have just enough love for God and brother or sister even only the size of "a crumb".

If you have that love, join us in this movement!

If you cannot spare God and his poor that little morsel then do not join us. Take your "crumb" with you, and go where the rich man in the parable was told by God to go.

PnP is PONDO NG PINOY.

PnP is PAG-IBIG NG PANGINOON.

PnP is PAG-ASA NG PILIPINO.

Maraming Salamat sa Inyong Lahat.

Pondo ng Pinoy

PnPCFI

What is PONDO ng PINOY?

First, PONDO ng PINOY is a movement, a way of making the Good News of Jesus Christ find concrete expression in the lives of the people, through Catechesis and acts of goodness. ("Love one another as I love you." John 15:12)

*Pag-ibig ng
Panginoon*



*Pag-asang
Pilipino*

**"Anumang magaling, kahit maliit,
basta't malimit, aypatungong lang'rt."**

Atthdome of Month

Second, PONDO ng PINOY is a Community Foundation, duly registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

What are the objectives of PONDO ng PINOY?

The objectives of PONDO ng PINOY are born out of a vision for all of God's people to attain fullness of life in the

family, community in the Church. PONDO ng PINOY aims to bring about the total development of people - both the giver and the recipient - of assistance to be rendered by the Church to address widespread poverty caused by material, economic, cultural, political and social starvation.

How does PONDO ng PINOY start?

PONDO ng PINOY begins with the individual being educated or catechized, at the person-to-person level or better still in the family.

Catechetical modules have been prepared for the family evangelization. Sunday Mass homilies on PONDO ng PINOY will also help in communal/individual evangelization. There will be school catechesis for students and teachers of Catholic schools, colleges and universities. Non-sectarian educational institutions will also be included upon participation of the school heads.

The Catechetical modules may be obtained from the Archdiocesan Catechetical Ministry Office (6th Flr. Saint John Bldg., Paco Catholic School, 1521 Paz St., Paco, Manila).

What is at the Heart of the Catechesis of PONDO ng PINOY?

The evangelization centerpiece of PONDO ng PINOY's catechesis is LOVE OF GOD and CONCERN FOR THE POOR and the LESS FORTUNATE. PONDO ng PINOY says that this love can be expressed daily in small but good things done for the others, especially those in need. This Christian practice is rooted in the Theology of the Crumbs whose pro-

found truth and value is safely anchored on the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) and other citations from the Bible.

In the Parable, Lazarus would beg for the crumbs, which fell from the rich man's dining table laden with sumptuous food. The crumbs would have been enough to answer the paltry needs of Lazarus, and had Dives, the rich man, not ignored the pleas of this poor man, he would not have suffered the torment of hell.

Thus the spirit of PONDO ng PINOY is LOVE and SHARING, done in small things but often, repeatedly, consistently as part of one's life and values. It says that what is important is not how big the portions given are but how steadily the heart beats for his or her fellowman in need.

Hence the call to action of PONDO ng PINOY is "Anumang magaling kahit maliit basta't malimit ay patungong langit."

What are the "crumbs" of PONDO ng PINOY?

The "crumbs" are twenty-five centavos or more but not more than one peso. Each individual is encouraged to have his or her distinctive kind of receptacle (an empty softdrink or milk can), which he or she can uniquely label.

Who are the source of the "crumbs"?

Literally everyone who feels the love of Christ and wishes to share it with others in a consistent manner can be part of PONDO ng PINOY.

All individuals - priests and religious, young and old, in or out-of-school youth, professionals, rich and poor.

Families living out the Gospel in solidarity.

Can anyone just start filling up his or her own PONDO ng PINOY receptacle?

Only those who have realized the virtue of sharing may give their "crumbs". Manila Archbishop Gaudencio B. Rosales emphasizes that PONDO ng PINOY is not precisely to collect money, but an evangelization component aimed at formation of the individual. "No one is allowed to give even just 25 centavos if it is not out of love," Archbishop Rosales said.

How will the "crumbs" be gathered?

Individuals and families may choose any receptacle for the coins they will contribute to PONDO ng PINOY. The parish organization or institution supporting the program may also provide the labeled receptacles.

Receptacles (cans, envelopes, bottles, baskets, etc.) should be labeled with the words "PONDO ng PINOY" and if possible (but not necessarily) bear the logo. The label may contain such information as the giver's name and the Parish (and address), where giver belongs.

How will the "crumbs" be offered?

It is strongly suggested that the families or individuals make their PONDO ng PINOY offering during the Sunday

Mass at their parishes/shrines or chapels, or given directly to the parish office, shrine or convent.

Employees may consign their "crumbs" to their respective companies, provided these are willing to act as conduits of their contributions to PONDO ng PINOY.

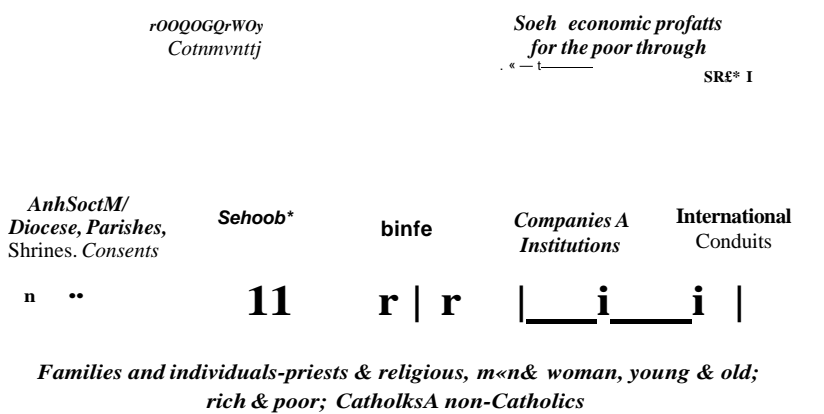
Students in schools which are members of CEAP and MAPSA may offer their "crumbs" receptacles in their schools.

Companies and institutions that wish to share with the poor through PONDO ng PINOY may offer their donations through intermediary banks or directly to the Foundation.

Filipinos abroad may make their offerings through institutions or organizations to be identified by the Foundation.

In the case of conduit banks, "crumbs" must be counted prior to deposit. Furnish the foundation with a copy of the deposit slip.

Flow Chart of the Gathering of the "Crumbs"



How will the "crumbs" be collected & distributed?

Policies and procedures on the allocation and distribution of the crumbs shall be formulated by the Board of Trustees in consultation with the participating Diocese and announced at a later date through conduit organizations.

Who manages the "crumbs"?

All "crumbs" that will be collected will be managed by the Pondo ng Pinoy Community Foundation, Inc. (PnPCFI), a non-profit organization. The Roman Catholic Church is the initiator, promoter and steward of the PnPCFI. The Foundation is headed by a Board of Trustees composed of distinguished lay leaders, Bishops, priests and religious.

The PnPCFI is registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission, with offices temporarily located at:

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION, INC.

2002 Jesus Street, CM Compound

Pandacan, Manila, Philippines

Tel. No.: 564-1831 local 203-231

Fax: 563-9309

E-mail: [pondo ng pinoy@yahoo.com](mailto:pondo_ng_pinoy@yahoo.com)

Reference: <http://goodshepherdscathedral.org/PnP.htm>

Crash Goes the Da Vinci Code

DR. RON RHODES*

Since Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, exploded on the scene, I have been asked numerous times by interested Christians to provide evidence against the claims in the book. I have generally responded to such requests via individual letters or emails. I had not originally intended to write a formal apologetic against the book. However, the requests continue to come in. I have therefore written this brief special report to provide an apologetic response to the more glaring errors in Brown's book.

This special report is arranged in a question-answer format. There are plenty of quotes from Dan Brown's book, so you

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will be clear where he stands on each issue. It will be demonstrated that when all the facts are considered, Brown's *Da Vinci Code* poses no threat to historic Christianity.

A. IS DAN BROWN'S *THE DA VINCI CODE* FACT OR FICTION?

Dan Brown's Position (Based on an NBC Today Show Interview):¹ *"Absolutely all of it. Obviously, Robert Langdon is fictional, but all of the art, architecture, secret rituals, secret societies - all of that is historical fact."*

The Truth of the Matter:

Brown can be challenged in at least two areas: (1) There are things he claims to be historical which, in fact, are not historical at all; and (2) he completely misrepresents biblical history. Let us briefly consider these two points:

1) There are things Brown claims to be historical which, in fact, are not historical at all. A primary case in point is the Priory of Sion, an organization that is at the very heart of Brown's story, and which, if proven to be based on bogus history, undermines the entire infrastructure of Brown's theory. This organization is said to guard the secret of Jesus' marriage to Mary Magdalene. It is claimed to have been founded in Jerusalem in 1099 by a French King. The organization is believed to be watching over Jesus and Mary's descendants, and waiting for the perfect time to reveal its secret to the

¹ Dan Brown, interview by Matt Lauer, The Today Show, NBC, 9 June 2003.

world. Because of constant threat of danger from the Roman Catholic Church, the organization has allegedly hidden its message in literature, paintings, and even architecture such that only learned people can decipher the meanings.

Brown makes the following assertion regarding this organization on page one of *The Da Vinci Code*: "The Priory of Sion - a European secret society founded in 1099 - is a real organization. In 1975 Paris's Bibliotheque Nationale discovered parchments known as Les Dossiers Secrets, identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci." The question is: Are these parchments reliable?

As a backdrop to answering this question, allow me to point out that Brown obtained much of his information on the Priory of Sion from a book entitled *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, by Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln. In this book we find a dependency on the above-mentioned parchments which allegedly prove that Jesus married Mary Magdalene, had a baby named Sarah, and, following Jesus' death on the cross, Mary relocated to a Jewish community in France. Their descendents were French allegedly royalty.

Now, here is the big problem with all this. These parchments are completely bogus. Historically, in 1953, a Frenchman named Pierre Plantard spent time in jail for fraud. In 1954 he founded a small social club named the Priory of Sion. The purpose of the club was to call for low-income housing in France. The organization dissolved in 1957, but Plantard held on to the name. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Plantard put together a number of bogus documents which "proved" the Jesus-Mary Magdalene theory, with French royalty being

their descendants. Plantard claimed that he himself was one of the descendents of this couple.

Some time later, a friend of the French president found himself in legal trouble and Plantard ended up being called to testify in the case. While under oath, the judge asked him about these documents about Jesus and Mary Magdalene, and he admitted he made the whole thing up. An associate of Plantard's also conceded that Plantard made the whole thing up. All this has been thoroughly documented by several French books and a BBC special.²

What all this means for *The Da Vinci Code* is that the Priory of Sion - and the accompanying Jesus-Mary Magdalene theory - is based on bogus information with a capital "B." Hence, Dan Brown's claim that his book is based on historical secret societies is flat wrong.

2) Dan Brown also completely misrepresents biblical history. He tries to argue that "history is always written by the winners. When two cultures clash, the loser is obliterated, and the winner writes the history books - books which glorify their own cause and disparage the conquered foe" (page 256).

In this line of thought, the true version of Christianity was Gnostic Christianity, but orthodox Christianity became more powerful and won out over the Gnostics. Because the orthodox Christians won over the Gnostics, they wrote history in a way favorable to their version of Christianity.

- Documented in James Garlow and Peter Jones, *Cracking Da Vinci's Code* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communications, 2004), p. 112.

Such a claim is preposterous. To begin, anyone who knows anything about Christian history knows that the early Christians were anything but "winners." The early Christians were fiercely persecuted by the Roman authorities (as well as by Jewish authorities). Christianity itself was outlawed by the Romans in the second century, and in the third and early fourth centuries, there was widespread persecution and murder of Christians. Some Christians were thrown into the arena to be eaten by lions, to the entertainment of Roman citizens who were watching. Other Christians were tied up on poles, drenched with fuel, and lit as streetlamps at night.

At the end of his life, Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome during Emperor Nero's persecution in A.D. 64. Previous to this, Peter had written two epistles to help other Christians being persecuted. Peter probably wrote from Rome at the outbreak of Nero's persecution. Having already endured beating at Herod's hands, Peter wrote his brethren in Asia probably to encourage and strengthen them in facing the Neronian persecution. It may well be that Peter recalled his Lord's injunctions: "Strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:32), and "Feed my sheep" (John 21:15-17). Paul, too, suffered persecution and was beheaded during the Neronian persecution in A.D. 64. The fact that New Testament writers gave their lives in defense of their writings says something. No one chooses to die for something that was made up out of thin air!

One of the purposes of the book of Revelation was to comfort Christians suffering persecution. The author is the apostle John, who himself had been imprisoned on the isle of Patmos (in the Aegean Sea) for the crime of sharing Jesus Christ with everyone he came into contact with (Revelation

1:9). The recipients of the book of Revelation were undergoing such severe persecution that some of them were being killed (see Revelation 2:13). Things were about to get even worse. John wrote this book to give his readers a strong hope that would help them patiently endure in the midst of suffering.

Despite all this heavy persecution, the church survived and spread around the world. Christianity grew not because the Christians were "winners" and wrote a "winner's history," but rather Christianity grew despite being big losers under Roman persecution.

Aside from all this, I must emphasize that Christianity is a religion in and of history. We find powerful substantiation for the true history of Christianity in archeology. The Bible's accuracy and reliability have been proved and verified over and over again by archeological finds produced by both Christian and non-Christian scholars and scientists. This includes verification for numerous customs, places, names, and events mentioned in the Bible. To date, over 25,000 sites in biblical lands have been discovered, dating back to Old Testament times, which have established the accuracy of innumerable details in the Bible.

In view of such discoveries, we can conclude that archeology is a true friend of the Bible. In no case has an archeological discovery controverted a biblical fact, but rather always serves to support the veracity of the Bible.

It is highly revealing that William Ramsey, a well-known historian and archeologist, set out to prove that Luke was not a reliable historian. He set out to show that both the Gospel

of Luke and the book of Acts (which Luke also wrote) were both unreliable in terms of chronology, places, names, and events. After a lifetime of study, he came to the conclusion that he had been utterly mistaken. He found Luke to be a first-rate historian whose work was flawless. (See his book, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, page 81.)

This is not surprising, since Luke - a medical doctor committed to accuracy - speaks of his methodology right at the start of his gospel: "Many have undertaken to draw up an account of the things that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed down to us by those who from the first were eyewitnesses and servants of the word. Therefore, since I myself have carefully investigated everything from the beginning, it seemed good also to me to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the certainty of the things you have been taught."

There is so much more that could be said. The above is sufficient, however, to demonstrate that while Dan Brown's theory is based on bogus evidence, Christianity and the Bible are backed by true historical evidence.

B. IS ALL RELIGION BASED ON FABRICATION?

Dan Brown's Position:

- o "Every faith in the world is based on fabrication. That is the definition of faith - acceptance of that which we imagine to be true, that which we cannot prove." (Page 341)

- o "Those who truly understand their faiths understand the stories are metaphorical.... Religious allegory has become

a part of the fabric of reality. And living in that reality helps millions of people cope and be better people." (Page 342)

The Truth of the Matter:

While it may be true that some world religions and cults are based on manmade fabrications, Christianity is based on historical God-sent revelation - both general revelation and special revelation. "General revelation" refers to revelation that is available to all persons of all times. An example of this would be God's revelation of Himself in the world of nature (Psalm 19). By observing the world of nature around us, we can detect something of God's existence, and discern something of His divine power and glory. We might say that the whole world is God's "kindergarten" to teach us the ABC's of the reality of God. Human beings cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see God. Indeed, God has engraved unmistakable marks of His glory on His creation.

There are, of course, limitations to how much we can learn from general revelation, for it tells us nothing about God's cure for man's sin problem. It tells us nothing of the "gospel message." These kinds of things require special revelation. But general revelation does give us enough information about God's existence that if we reject it, and refuse to turn to God, God is justified in bringing condemnation against us (Romans 1:20).

"Special revelation" refers to God's very specific and clear revelation in such things as His mighty acts in history, the person of Jesus Christ, and His message spoken through Old Testament prophets (like Isaiah and Daniel) and New Testament apostles (like Paul and Peter).

God's Revelation in History

God is the living God, and He has communicated knowledge of Himself through the ebb and flow of historical experience. The Bible is first and foremost a record of the history of God's interactions among Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the twelve tribes of Israel, the apostle Paul, Peter, John, and all the other people of God in biblical times.

The greatest revelatory act of God in Old Testament history was the deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt. God, through Moses, inflicted ten plagues on the Egyptians that thoroughly demonstrated His awesome power (Exodus 7-12). God's demonstration of power was all the more impressive since the Egyptians believed their many false gods had the power to protect them from such plagues.

Note that the historical miracles and events wrought by God were always accompanied by spoken words. The miracle or event was never left to speak for itself. Nor were human beings left to infer whatever conclusions they wanted to draw from the event (fabrications). God made sure that when a significant event occurred there was a prophet at hand to interpret it. For example, Moses was there to record everything related to the Exodus. The apostles were there to record everything related to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. God has revealed Himself in history, and He always made sure that His historical actions were adequately recorded!

God's Ultimate Revelation in Jesus Christ

The only way for God to be able to fully do and say all that He wanted was to actually leave His eternal residence

and enter the arena of humanity. This He did in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus was God's ultimate "special" revelation.

Scripture indicates that God is a Spirit (John 4:24). And because He is a Spirit, He is invisible (Colossians 1:15). With our normal senses, we cannot perceive Him, other than what we can detect in general revelation. Further, man is spiritually blind and deaf (1 Corinthians 2:14). Since the fall of man in the Garden of Eden, man has lacked true spiritual perception. So humankind was in need of special revelation from God in the worst sort of way.

Jesus - as eternal God - took on human flesh so He could be God's fullest revelation to man (Hebrews 1:2,3). Jesus was a revelation of God not just in His person (as God) but in His life and teachings as well. By observing the things Jesus did and the things Jesus said, we learn a great deal about God. For example, God's awesome power was revealed in Jesus (John 3:2). God's incredible wisdom was revealed in Jesus (1 Corinthians 1:24). God's boundless love was revealed and demonstrated by Jesus (1 John 3:16). And God's unfathomable grace was revealed in Jesus (2 Thessalonians 1:12).

These verses serve as the backdrop as to why Jesus told a group of Pharisees, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me" (John 12:44). Jesus likewise told Philip that "anyone who has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Jesus was the ultimate historical revelation of God!

God's Revelation in the Bible

Another key means of "special" revelation is the Bible. In this one book, God has provided everything He wants us to know about Him and how we can have a relationship with Him.

God is the one who caused the Bible to be written (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21). And through it He speaks to us today just as He spoke to people in ancient times when those words were first given. The Bible is to be received as God's words to us and revered and obeyed as such. As we submit to the Bible's authority, we place ourselves under the authority of the living God.

(Dan Brown tries to argue against the reliability of the Bible. I shall address this claim later in this paper.)

C. IS CHRISTIANITY ROOTED IN PAGANISM?

Dan Brown's Position:

"Nothing in Christianity is original. The pre-Christian God Mithras - called the Son of God and the Light of the World - was born on December 25, died, was buried in a rock tomb, and then resurrected in three days. By the way, December 25 is also the birthday of Osiris, Adonis, and Dionysus." (Page 232)

The Truth of the Matter:

A common apologetic against Christianity is the idea that it borrowed from Greek pagan religions. The virgin birth is often cited as an example. The reality, if you look at Greek

mythology and paganism, is that their male gods would come down and have sex with human women and give birth to hybrid beings. This is not what happened in terms of the virgin birth. Jesus is eternal deity. When the Holy Spirit overshadowed Mary, it was specifically to produce a human nature within her womb for the eternal Son of God to step into, after which he was born as the God-Man (100-percent God and 100-percent man) nine months later. This is entirely different from Greek paganism. One should also note that the virgin birth of Jesus was prophesied (e.g., Isaiah 7:14) hundreds of years before these pagan religions were setting forth their versions of a virgin birth.

It is sometimes argued that Christianity borrowed its "miracles" - such as turning water into wine, walking on water, and the resurrection itself - from Greek pagan mythology. Dr. Ronald Nash has responded convincingly to such absurd claims. Below is a summary of key points based on an article Nash wrote.³ He has also written the book, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, which you may wish to purchase and read for more thorough documentation. Nash argues:

O Many alleged similarities between Christianity and the Greek pagan religions are either greatly exaggerated or fabricated. Liberal scholars (such as those in the Jesus Seminar) often describe pagan rituals in language that they borrowed from Christianity, thereby making them appear to be "parallel" doctrines.

**Ron Nash, *Was the New Testament Influenced by Pagan Religions?*
Christian Research Journal, August 1994.**

o The chronology for such claims is all wrong. Nash writes: "Almost all of our sources of information about the pagan religions alleged to have influenced early Christianity are dated very late. We frequently find writers quoting from documents written 300 years [later]... We must reject the assumption that just because a cult had a certain belief or practice in the third or fourth century after Christ, it therefore had the same belief or practice in the first century."

o New Testament scholar Bruce Metzger is quoted by Nash: "It must not be uncritically assumed that the Mysteries [i.e., pagan religions] always influenced Christianity, for it is not only possible but probable that in certain cases, the influence moved in the opposite direction." Nash notes that it should not be surprising that leaders of cults that were being successfully challenged by Christianity should do something to counter the challenge. What better way to do this than by offering a pagan substitute? Pagan attempts to counter the growing influence of Christianity by imitating it are clearly apparent in measures instituted by Julian the Apostate.

C As for claims of resurrection among pagan gods, Nash comments: "Which mystery gods actually experienced a resurrection from the dead? Certainly no early texts refer to any resurrection of Attis. Nor is the case for a resurrection of Osiris any stronger. One can speak of a 'resurrection' in the stories of Osiris, Attis, and Adonis only in the most extended of senses. For example, after Isis gathered together the pieces of Osiris's dismembered body, Osiris became 'Lord of the Underworld.' This is a poor substitute for a resurrection like that of Jesus Christ. And, no claim can be made that Mithras was a dying and rising god. The tide of scholarly opinion has

turned dramatically against attempts to make early Christianity dependent on the so-called dying and rising gods of Hellenistic paganism. Any unbiased examination of the evidence shows that such claims must be rejected."

O The mysticism of the mystery religions was essentially nonhistorical. The religion of Christianity is grounded in history (see my earlier discussion).

D. IS THE BIBLE AN UNRELIABLE DOCUMENT?

Dan Brown's Position:

◁> "The Bible is a product of man...not of God." (Page 231)

O "The New Testament is false testimony." (Page 345)

o "The New Testament is based on fabrications." (Page 341)

o "The Bible... has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book." (Page 231)

The Truth of the Matter:

The Bible is not the product of man but is rather God-inspired. Inspiration does not mean the biblical writer just felt enthusiastic, like the composer of the "Star Spangled Banner." Nor does it mean the writings are necessarily inspiring to read, like an uplifting poem. The biblical Greek word for inspiration literally means "God-breathed." Because Scripture is breathed out by God - because it originates from Him - it is true and inerrant.

Biblical inspiration may be defined as God's superintending of the human authors so that, using their own individual personalities - and even their writing styles - they composed and recorded without error His revelation to humankind in the words of the original autographs. In other words, the original documents of the Bible were written by men, who, though permitted to exercise their own personalities and literary talents, wrote under the control and guidance of the Holy Spirit, the result being a perfect and errorless recording of the exact message God desired to give to man. Hence, the writers of Scripture were not mere writing machines. God did not use them like keys on a typewriter to mechanically reproduce His message. Nor did He dictate the words, page by page. The biblical evidence makes it clear that each writer had a style of his own. (Isaiah had a powerful literary style; Jeremiah had a mournful tone; Luke's style had medical overtones; and John was very simple in his approach.) The Holy Spirit infallibly worked through each of these writers, through their individual styles, to inerrantly communicate His message to humankind.

Second Peter 1:21 provides a key insight regarding the human-divine interchange in the process of inspiration. This verse informs us that "prophecy [or Scripture] never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." The phrase carried along in this verse literally means "forcefully borne along." Even though human beings were used in the process of writing down God's Word, they were all literally "borne along" by the Holy Spirit. The human wills of the authors were not the originators of God's message. God did not permit the will of sinful human beings to misdirect or erroneously record His

message. Rather, "God moved and the prophet mouthed these truths; God revealed and man recorded His word."⁴

Interestingly, the Greek word for "carried along" in 2 Peter 1:21 is the same as that found in Acts 27:15-17. In this passage the experienced sailors could not navigate the ship because the wind was so strong. The ship was being driven, directed, and carried along by the wind. This is similar to the Spirit's driving, directing, and carrying the human authors of the Bible as He wished. The word is a strong one, indicating the Spirit's complete superintendence of the human authors. Yet, just as the sailors were active on the ship (though the wind, not the sailors, ultimately controlled the ship's movement), so the human authors were active in writing as the Spirit directed.

I believe the New Testament writers were aware that their writings were inspired by God. In 1 Corinthians 2:13 the apostle Paul said he spoke "not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words." In this passage Paul (who wrote over half the New Testament) affirmed that his words were authoritative because they were rooted not in fallible men but infallible God (the Holy Spirit). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth who was promised to the apostles to teach and guide them into all the truth (see John 16:13). Later, in 1 Corinthians 14:37, Paul said, "If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command." In 1 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul

⁴ Norman Geisler and William Nix, *A General Introduction to the Bible* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1978), p. 28.

likewise said, "And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is at work in you who believe." Again, the reason why Paul's words were authoritative is that they were rooted in God, not in man. God used Paul as His instrument to communicate His word to man.

What about Dan Brown's claim that the New Testament is based on fabrications? The statement is patently false. The New Testament is not made up of fairytales but is rather based on eyewitness testimony. In 2 Peter 1:16 we read, "We did not follow cleverly invented stories when we told you about the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty." First John 1:1 affirms, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life." So convinced were these and other eyewitnesses that they ended up giving their lives in defense of what they knew to be true.

While Dan Brown claims the Bible has evolved through countless translations, additions, and revisions, he can only argue this way by ignoring well-established facts. First, while there have been numerous translations of the Bible into a variety of languages, each such translation utilizes the same basic set of Hebrew and Greek manuscript copies of the original writings of the Bible. There are more than 5,000 partial and complete manuscript copies of the New Testament. These manuscript copies are very ancient and they are available for inspection now. Following are some highlights:

o The Chester Beatty papyrus (P45) dates to the 3rd century A.D., and contains the four Gospels and the Book of Acts (chapters 4-17). (P = papyrus.)

o The Chester Beatty papyrus (P46) dates to about A.D. 200, and contains ten Pauline epistles (all but the Pastorals) and the Book of Hebrews.

o The Chester Beatty papyrus (P47) dates to the 3rd century A.D., and contains Revelation 9:10-1 T.2.

o The Bodmer Papyrus (P66) dates to about A.D. 200, and contains the Gospel of John.

o The Bodmer Papyrus (P75) dates to the early 3rd century, and contains Luke and John.

o The Sinaiticus uncial manuscript dates to the 4th century, and contains the entire New Testament.

o The Vaticanus uncial manuscript dates to the 4th century, and contains most of the New Testament except Hebrews 9:14ff the Pastoral Epistles, Philemon, and Revelation.

o The Washingtonianus uncial manuscript dates to the early 5th century, and contains the Gospels.

o The Alexandrinus uncial manuscript dates to the 5th century, and contains most of the New Testament.

o The Ephraemi Rescriptus uncial manuscript dates to the 5th century, and contains portions of every book except 2 Thessalonians and 2 John.

o The Bezae/Cantabrigiensis uncial manuscript dates to the 5th century, and contains the Gospels and Acts.

- o The Claromontanus uncial manuscript dates to the 6th century and contains the Pauline epistles and Hebrews.
- o The Itala version (versions were prepared for missionary purposes) dates to the 3rd century.
- £> The Vulgate version dates to the 4th century and later.
- o The Syriac version dates to the 2nd to 6th centuries.
- o The Coptic version dates to the 3rd and 4th centuries.
- o The Armenian version dates to the 5th century.
- o The Georgian version dates to the 5th century.

There are also some 86,000 quotations of the New Testament from the early church fathers and several thousand Lectionaries (church-service books containing Scripture quotations used in the early centuries of Christianity). In fact, there are enough quotations from the early church fathers that even if we did not have a single manuscript copy of the Bible, scholars could still reconstruct all but 11 verses of the entire New Testament from material written within 150 to 200 years from the time of Christ.

What about the variants that exist among the biblical manuscripts? It is true to say that in the thousands of manuscript copies we possess of the New Testament, scholars have discovered that there are some 200,000 "variants." This may seem like a staggering figure to the uninformed mind, but to people who study the issue, the numbers of variants are not so damning as it may initially appear. Indeed, a look at the hard evidence shows that the New Testament manuscripts are amazingly accurate and trustworthy.

To begin, I must emphasize that out of these 200,000 variants, over 99 percent hold virtually no significance whatsoever. Many of these variants simply involve a missing letter in a word; some involve reversing the order of two words (such as "Christ Jesus" instead of "Jesus Christ"); some may involve the absence of one or more insignificant words. When all the facts are put on the table, only about 40 of the variants have any real significance - and even then, no doctrine of the Christian faith or any moral commandment is affected by them. For more than 99 percent of the cases the original text can be reconstructed to a practical certainty.

By practicing the science of textual criticism - comparing all the available manuscripts with each other - we can come to an assurance regarding what the original document must have said. Perhaps an illustration might be helpful.

Let us suppose we have five manuscript copies of an original document that no longer exists. Each of the manuscript copies is different. Our goal is to compare the manuscript copies and ascertain what the original must have said. Here are the five copies:

Manuscript #1: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the whole world.

Manuscript #2: Christ Jesus is the Savior of the whole world.

Manuscript #3: Jesus Christ the Savior of the whole world.

Manuscript #4: Jesus is Savior of the whole world.

Manuscript #5: Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world.

Could you, by comparing the manuscript copies, ascertain what the original document said with a high degree of certainty that you are correct? Of course you could.

This illustration may be extremely simplistic, but a great majority of the 200,000 variants are solved by the above methodology. By comparing the various manuscripts, most of which contain relatively minor differences like the above, it becomes fairly clear what the original must have said. Further, I must emphasize that the sheer volume of manuscripts we possess greatly narrows the margin of doubt regarding what the original biblical document said.

I want to make mention of the Dead Sea Scrolls in this regard. (This is important, for Dan Brown seems to think the Dead Sea Scrolls support his position.) In these scrolls discovered at Qumran in 1947, we have Old Testament manuscripts that date about a thousand years earlier (150 B.C.) than the other Old Testament manuscripts previously in our possession (which dated to A.D. 980). The significant thing is that when one compares the two sets of manuscripts, it is clear that they are essentially the same, with very few changes. The fact that manuscripts separated by a thousand years are essentially the same indicates the incredible accuracy of the Old Testament's manuscript transmission.

The copy of the Book of Isaiah discovered at Qumran illustrates this accuracy. Dr. Gleason Archer, who personally examined both the A.D. 980 and 150 B.C. copies of Isaiah, comments:

Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand

years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling.⁵

The Dead Sea Scrolls prove that the copyists of biblical manuscripts took great care in going about their work. These copyists knew they were duplicating God's Word. Hence they went to incredible lengths to insure that no error crept into their work. The scribes carefully counted every line, word, syllable, and letter to guarantee accuracy. Scholar L. Bevan Jones writes:

The Massoretes... numbered the verses, words, and letters of every book. They calculated the middle word and the middle letter of each. They enumerated verses which contained all the letters of the alphabet, or a certain number of them; and so on. These trivialities, as we might rightly consider them, had yet the effect of securing minute attention to the precise transmission of the text; and they are but an excessive manifestation of a respect for the sacred Scriptures which in itself deserves nothing but praise. The Massoretes were indeed anxious that not one jot or tittle - not one smallest letter nor one tiny part of a letter - of the Law should pass away or be lost.⁶

•^ Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), p. 19; emphasis added.

⁶ L. Bevan Jones, *Christianity Explained to Muslims: A Manual for Christian Workers* (Calcutta: YMCA, 1938), in *The World of Islam* CD-ROM.

I want to also make a few comments regarding Brown's claim that the New Testament has gone through numerous revisions, as if changes have been made century by century:

- o Within the first few centuries of Christianity, there were thousands of copies of the Bible dispersed over a large part of the world. To successfully revise or make a change in the Bible, all these copies would have to be meticulously gathered (assuming people around the world would be willing to surrender them, an impossible-to-believe scenario), and then the changes made.

- o Another scenario is that thousands of Bible-owning people from around the world met together and colluded to make the changes. But since most of these people were true believers, is it likely they would tamper with a book upon which they were basing their eternal salvation? Would such collusion even be physically possible?

- o Within the first few centuries of Christianity, the Bible was translated into a number of languages. Are we to believe these various translations were identically altered all over the world so they would have a uniform revision?

O Scholar William J. Saal raises the point that if Christians corrupted the New Testament, wouldn't unflattering episodes about Christians have been removed from the New Testament (like Peter denying Christ three times, and the disciples scattering like a bunch of faithless cowards when Christ was arrested)? One would think so.

In my view, the almighty God who had the power and sovereign control to inspire the Scriptures in the first place is surely going to continue to exercise His power and sovereign

control in the preservation of Scripture. Further, God's preservational work is illustrated in the very text of the Bible. By examining how Christ viewed the Old Testament (keeping in mind that Jesus did not have in His possession the original books penned by the Old Testament writers, but possessed only copies), we see that He had full confidence that the Scriptures He used had been faithfully preserved through the centuries.

Bible scholar Greg Bahnsen writes: "Because Christ raised no doubts about the adequacy of the Scripture as His contemporaries knew them, we can safely assume that the first-century text of the Old Testament was a wholly adequate representation of the divine word originally given. Jesus regarded the extant copies of His day as so approximate to the originals in their message that He appealed to those copies as authoritative."⁷ The respect Jesus and His apostles held for the extant Old Testament text is an expression of their confidence that God providentially preserved these copies and translations so that they were substantially identical with the inspired originals. We can deduce that the same is true regarding the New Testament and God's preservation of the entire Bible through history.

Another related factor to note is that in Revelation 22: 18-19 we read, "I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God

⁷ Greg L. Bahnsen, *The Inerrancy of the Autographw*, in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980), p. 161.

will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book." The Jews were also given similar commands in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy 4:2 says, "Do not add to what I command you and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the LORD your God that I give you." Deuteronomy 12:32 says, "See that you do all I command you; do not add to it or take away from it." Proverbs 30:5-6 says, "Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar." In view of such verses, one must ask how feasible it is to suggest that Bible-believing Christians would choose to corrupt and change God's Word? Such individuals would not only be damning themselves before God, but also misleading all their descendants (their children and their children's children) who would read the very Scriptures they corrupted. How likely is that?

E. WERE THERE EIGHTY GOSPELS COMPETING FOR INCLUSION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?

Dan Brown's Position:

"More than eighty gospels were considered for the New Testament, and yet only a relative few were chosen for inclusion - Matthew, Mark, Luke and John." (Page 231)

The Truth of the Matter:

Such a view is absolute nonsense. Aside from the four canonical gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), history reveals there were only twelve other gospels in circulation

during this general time, and these were clearly not "inspired Scripture." There were also Gnostic gospels that emerged later, but these are too late to be counted.

The four gospels in our present Bible were chosen for good reason. First, early in church history, four centers of Christianity emerged: Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexander, and Rome. These centers of Christianity used the four gospels in our present Bible.

Christian leaders who lived between A.D. 95 and 170 consistently point to the reliability of the New Testament Gospels. Following is a sampling.

1) **Clement.** Clement was a leading elder in the church at Rome. In his epistle to the Corinthians (c. A.D. 95), he cites portions of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and introduces them as the actual words of Jesus.⁸

2) **Papias.** Papias, the bishop of Hierapolis in Phrygia and author of Exposition of Oracles of the Lord (c. A.D. 130), cites the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, presumably as canonical. He specifically refers to John's Gospel as containing the words of Jesus.⁹

3) **Justin Martyr.** Justin Martyr, foremost apologist of the second century (A.D. 140), considered all four Gospels to be Scripture.¹⁰

⁸ Gary R. Habermas, *ANCIENT Evidence for the Life of Jesus* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), p. 65.

⁹ Habermas, p. 66.

¹⁰ Geisler and Nix, p. 186.

4) **The Didache.** The Didache, an ancient manual of Christianity that dates between the end of the first century and the beginning of the second century, cites portions of the three synoptic Gospels and refers to them as the words of Jesus. This manual quotes extensively from Matthew's gospel.¹¹

5) **Polycarp.** Polycarp, a disciple of the apostle John, quotes portions of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and refers to them as the words of Jesus (c. A.D. 150).¹²

6) **Irenaeus.** Irenaeus, a disciple of Polycarp (c. A.D. 170), quoted from twenty-three of the twenty-seven New Testament books, omitting only Philemon, James, 2 Peter, and 3 John.¹³

7) **The Muratorian Fragment** dates to about A.D. 175, and lists the four canonical gospels. Indeed, it lists 23 of the 27 books in the New Testament.

8) **Papyrus 45**, dated around A.D. 200, has all four canonical gospels together.

Clearly, there are many early sources dating between A.D. 95 and 150 that refer to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John as containing the actual words of Christ. History is therefore on the side of the New Testament Gospels.

¹¹ Geisler and Nix, p. 190.

¹² Geisler and Nix, p. 190.

¹³ Geisler and Nix, p. 190.

F. DID CONSTANTINE CHOOSE WHICH BOOKS BELONG IN THE BIBLE FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES?

Dan Brown's Position:

o "The modern Bible was compiled and edited by men who possessed a political agenda ... to solidify their own power base." (Page 234)

o "Constantine commissioned and financed a new Bible, which omitted those gospels that spoke of Christ's human traits and embellished those gospels that made Him godlike. The earlier gospels were outlawed, gathered up, and burned." (Page 234)

0 "The early Church needed to convince the world that the mortal prophet Jesus was a divine being. Therefore, any gospels that described earthly aspects of Jesus' life had to be omitted from the Bible." (Page 244)

The Truth of the Matter:

Such a view is nonsense! History is quite clear regarding the activities of Constantine, and one thing he had virtually nothing to do with was the canon of Scripture.

I find it highly revealing that a number of the New Testament books were recognized as belonging in the canon right there in New Testament times, far before Constantine was even born. For example, in 1 Timothy 5:18, the apostle Paul joined an Old Testament reference and a New Testament reference and called them both (collectively) "Scripture" (Deuteronomy 25:4 and Luke 10:7). It would not have been unusual in the context of first-century Judaism for an Old

Testament passage to be called "Scripture." But for a New Testament book to be called "Scripture" so soon after it was written says volumes about Paul's view of the authority of contemporary New Testament books.

More specifically, only three years had elapsed between the writing of Luke's Gospel and the writing of 1 Timothy (Luke was written around A.D. 60; 1 Timothy was written around A.D. 63). Yet, despite this, Paul (himself a Jew - a "Hebrew of Hebrews") does not hesitate to place Luke on the same level of authority as the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy.

Further, the writings of the apostle Paul were recognized as Scripture by the apostle Peter (2 Peter 3:16). Paul, too, understood that his own writings were inspired by God and therefore authoritative (1 Corinthians 14:37; 1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul, of course, wrote over half the New Testament. This means that hundreds of years before the time of Constantine, many of the New Testament books were already considered canonical.

Later, when the heretic Marcion emerged on the scene (who came up with his own false canon), it became necessary for the church to formally put in concrete a list of canonical books. When the church made this formal pronouncement, it simply affirmed the books that had already been accepted as canonical by the church at large. It was like a final "stamp of approval."

The basic rules that guided recognition of the canon are as follows, listed in question format:

1) Was the book written or backed by a prophet or apostle of God? This is the single most important test. The reasoning here is that the Word of God which is inspired by the Spirit of God for the people of God must be communicated through a man of God.¹⁴ Deuteronomy 18:18 informs us that only a prophet of God will speak the Word of God. Second Peter 1:20-21 assures us that Scripture is only written by men of God. In Galatians 1:1-24 the apostle Paul argued support for the Book of Galatians by appealing to the fact that he was an authorized messenger of God, an apostle.

2) Is the book authoritative? In other words, can it be said of this book as it was said of Jesus, "The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law" (Mark 1:22). Put another way, does this book ring with the sense of, "Thus saith the Lord"?

3) Does the book tell the truth about God and doctrine as it is already known by previous revelation? The Bereans searched the OT Scriptures to see whether Paul's teaching was true (Acts 17:11). They knew that if Paul's teaching did not accord with the Old Testament canon, it could not be of God. Agreement with all earlier revelation is essential (Gal. 1:8).

4) Does the book give evidence of having the power of God? The reasoning here is that any writing that does not exhibit the transforming power of God in the lives of its readers could not have come from God. Scripture says that

¹⁴ Norman Geisler, class notes for Bibliology, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1979.

the Word of God is "living and active" (Hebrews 4:12). Second Timothy 3:16-17 indicates that God's Word has a transforming effect. If the book in question did not have the power to change a life, then, it was reasoned, the book could not have come from God.

5) Was the book accepted by the people of God? In Old Testament times, Moses's scrolls were placed immediately into the Ark of the Covenant (Deuteronomy 31:24-26). Joshua's writings were added in the same fashion (Joshua 24:26). In the New Testament, Paul thanked the Thessalonians for receiving the apostle's message as the Word of God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). Paul's letters were circulated among the churches (Colossians 4: 16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27). It is the norm that God's people - that is, the majority of them and not simply a faction - will initially receive God's Word as such.

In the interest of accuracy, I will note that there were some books that were doubted for a time, but not for long. The books that were doubted for a time were Hebrews, James, 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude, and Revelation.

Hebrews was doubted because the author of the book was unknown. However, the book eventually came to be viewed as having apostolic authority, if not apostolic authorship.

James was doubted because of its apparent conflict with Paul's teaching about salvation by faith alone. The conflict was resolved by seeing the works James speaks of as an out-growth of real faith.

Second Peter was doubted because the style of this book differs from that of 1 Peter. It seems clear, however, that

Peter used a scribe to write 1 Peter (see 1 Peter 5:12). So a style conflict is not really a problem.

Second and 3 John were doubted because the author of these books is called "elder," not "apostle." However, Peter (an apostle) is also called "elder" in 1 Peter 5:1. So it seems clear that the same person can be both an elder and an apostle.

Jude was doubted because it refers to two noncanonical books - the Book of Enoch and the Assumption of Moses. This objection was eventually overcome because even Paul quoted from pagan poets (see Acts 17:28 and Titus 1:12). Moreover, Jude enjoyed early acceptance by most of the early believers.

The Book of Revelation was doubted because it teaches a thousand-year reign of Christ. Since there was a local contemporary cult that taught the same, it was reasoned that Revelation must not be true Scripture. However, because many of the earliest church fathers believed in a thousand-year reign of Christ too, this objection was eventually seen as being without merit.

One thing is certain. The biblical canon was firmly established long before Constantine's time. Hence, Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* is woefully inaccurate on this issue.

G. DID CONSTANTINE CONVERT THE WORLD FROM MATRIARCHAL PAGANISM TO PATRIARCHAL CHRISTIANITY?

Dan Brown's Position:

"Constantine and his male successors successfully converted the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal

Christianity by waging a campaign of propaganda that demonized the sacred feminine, obliterating the goddess from modern religion forever." (Page 124)

The Truth of the Matter:

Constantine did not convert the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity. Again, history is quite clear about what Constantine did and did not do, and matriarchal paganism was not something that even concerned him.

Historical studies have proven that in almost all societies around the world, rule has been patriarchal in nature. This is not to deny the reigns of various queens in some cultures, but by and large, patriarchal rule has been the normal pattern throughout recorded history. This was certainly the case during New Testament times.

It is therefore false to say that the early orthodox Christians overcame "early" matriarchal pagans so that their own "later" version of Christianity would prevail. Such a view involves the worst kind of revisionism, pure and simple. To say there was a campaign to demonize the "sacred feminine" - a view with ZERO historical support - is on a level of those who continue to claim Elvis sightings today.

H. ARE THE Gnostic GOSPELS RELIABLE DOCUMENTS?

Dan Brown's Position:

o The Nag Hammadi gospels "highlight glaring discrepancies and fabrications ... [in] the modern Bible." (Page 234)

o The Nag Hammadi scrolls are "the earliest Christian records." (Page 245)

o "Fortunately for historians... some of the gospels that Constantine attempted to eradicate managed to survive. The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in the 1950s hidden in a cave near Qumran in the Judean desert." (Page 234)

The Truth of the Matter:

Christians have been concerned about false gospels since the early years of Christianity. In his classic *Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies), Irenaeus (A.D. 130-200) refers to "an unspeakable number of apocryphal and spurious writings, which they themselves [heretics] had forged, to bewilder the minds of the foolish."¹⁵ One of the Gnostic gospels discovered at Nag Hammadi in 1945 is The Gospel of Truth, about which Irenaeus says: "It agrees in nothing with the Gospels of the Apostles, so that they have really no Gospel which is not full of blasphemy. For if what they have published is the Gospel of Truth, and yet is totally unlike those which have been handed down to us by the Apostles... [then] that which has been handed down from the Apostles can no longer be reckoned the Gospel of Truth."¹⁶ Origen (A.D. 185-253) noted that "the Church possesses four Gospels, heresy a great many."¹⁷

¹⁵ Irenaeus. *Adversus Haereses*, i.20.1.

¹⁶ *The Biblical World*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 404-405.

¹⁷ *First Homily on Luke*: cited by Yamauchi, *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), s.v. "Nag Hammadi," Vol. 3, p. 182.

Presently there are three theories about the formation of the Nag Hammadi collection. One theory is that the library belonged to a Sethian Gnostic sect who lived in the Nag Hammadi area. Seth, a son of Adam, was highly regarded as the ancestor of the race of enlightened Gnostics and is mentioned prominently in some Nag Hammadi texts. A second theory is that the library was collected by Christian Gnostic monks before the time when such monks were considered heretics and consequently expelled. Such monks may have hidden their gospels for safekeeping. A third theory is that the library was collected by orthodox monks for use in refuting Gnostic heretics. Regardless of which theory is correct, *Da Vinci Code* enthusiasts believe the Gnostic Gospels are authentic. But are they?

Most scholars agree that the Gnostic Gospels date far too late to be reliable. The earliest Gnostic Gospels may date as early as A.D. 150, but most date in the third and fourth centuries. Further, there are no historical or geographical elements in these "gospels" that can be objectively verified, as is true in the canonical gospels. There are certainly no genuine eyewitness accounts in these late gospels. Moreover, no one - not even liberal theologians - believes The Gospel of Thomas was written by the biblical Thomas, and that The Gospel of Philip was written by the biblical Philip.

The canonical gospels have been thoroughly tested in regard to history, and have been found to be exceedingly accurate. Earlier I noted that scholar William Ramsey set out to prove, through many years of research, that Luke was not a reliable historian, either in his Gospel or in the book of Acts (which he also authored). Following his exhaustive study,

Ramsey concluded that Luke was a first-rate historian in terms of geography, people, place names, and the like. And, as noted earlier, Luke's Gospel is dated at A.D. 60. Recall that Luke's Gospel is mentioned as Scripture in I Timothy 5:18, and 1 Timothy is dated at A.D. 63. Hence, Luke's gospel was recognized as Scripture within three years of its writing - hundreds of years before most of the Gnostic gospels.

Related to this, I need to point out that the apostle Paul died during the Neronian persecution, which took place in A.D. 64. Paul was certainly still alive as of the end of the book of Acts. This means Acts was written prior to A.D. 64. We further know that Luke wrote his Gospel ("Luke") before he wrote the book of Acts, which means that Luke was written around A.D. 60, which places him notably earlier than the Gnostic Gospels.

Scholars have often pointed out that all four canonical gospels must date prior to A.D. 70 for one simple fact: All four of them fail to mention anything at all about the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in A.D. 70 at the hands of Titus and his Roman warriors. The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple would be on a par with the Holocaust in modern times. For this horrific event not to be mentioned can mean only one thing: the four canonical gospels must have been written prior to this time.

As far as the Gnostic Gospels go, one does not have to read them for long to discover that they are irreconcilable with the New Testament Gospels. This is an important point, because if the historical evidence supports the New Testament Gospels (as I have argued above), the Gnostic Gospels are

thereby proven to be false and doctrinally unreliable. Consider the following:

1) The Gnostic Gospels portray Jesus as commanding the disciples to keep his teaching secret, but the New Testament Jesus commissioned the disciples to share the good news with the whole world. The Gospel of Thomas begins with these words: "These are the secret sayings which the living Jesus spoke...."¹⁸ The Apocryphon of John, another Gnostic document, contains a sober warning by Jesus of a curse that would fall on any who share his secret teaching with outsiders: "Cursed be everyone who will exchange these things for a gift, or for food, or for drink, or for clothing, or for any other such things."¹⁹ Jesus also allegedly commanded John to put written records of his secret teachings in "a safe place." Does this sound like the Jesus of the Sermon on the Mount?

It was quite common among Gnostics to be protective of the gnosis, or secret teaching. Nag Hammadi analyst John Dart comments: "The 'curse' of Jesus in The Apocryphon of John, put into Jesus' mouth by Gnostic authors, followed a time-honored practice of mystic groups warning their members that such sacred scriptures should not fall into the wrong hands. For historians, much more interesting was the advice to put the writings in a safe place. In the case of the Gnostic

¹⁸ The Nag Hammadi Library, ed. James M. Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1978), p. 118.

¹⁹ John Dart, *Jesus of Heresy and History: The Discovery and Meaning of the Nag Hammadi Gnostic Library* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 15.

papyri, the place, wherever it was, **had been** 'safe' for **centuries** [until 19471."²⁰

Such a secretive attitude, however, is **completely unlike** the Jesus of the New Testament Gospels. In what is traditionally called "The Great Commission," Jesus commanded the disciples: "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations...." (Matt. 28: 19). Before He ascended into heaven following His resurrection, Jesus said to the disciples: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Clearly, the New Testament Jesus wanted people everywhere to hear the good news of salvation.

2) The teachings of Jesus in the New Testament Gospels are utterly incompatible with Gnosticism. Some of Jesus' teachings in the Gospels may be open to a variety of interpretations, but this is a far cry from saying that they can be construed to teach any form of Gnosticism. Among other things, the Gnostics taught (1) the existence of both a transcendent God and a lower God (the Creator-Demiurge), whom Gnostics equated with Yahweh of the Old Testament; (2) spirit is good but matter is evil; (3) man's spirit is imprisoned in the material body but will escape this imprisonment at death; and (4) there is no physical resurrection of the body.

The New Testament Jesus taught none of these ideas. Contrary to Gnostic teachings, scholar Gary Habermas tells us that "Jesus does not refer to Yahv/eh as less than the supreme

Dart, p. 16.

Creator and God of the universe. Neither does he speak of the physical body as a necessary evil which imprisons the soul. With regard to eternal life, Jesus taught the [physical] resurrection of the body, not the [mere] immortality of the soul."²¹

3) The Gnostic Gospels offer us a redemption through gnosis, whereas New Testament redemption is based wholly on faith in Christ. The truth of The Gospel of Truth (for the Gnostic) is the knowledge that he is "a being from above."²² This "gospel" assures us that "whosoever has knowledge understands from whence he has come and whither he goes."²³ The Teachings of Silvanus, another Gnostic document, portrays Jesus as teaching salvation by enlightenment: "Bring in your guide and your teacher. The mind is the guide, but reason is the teacher. They will bring you out of destruction and dangers Enlighten your mind.... Light the lamp within you."²⁴

Contrary to this, redemption in the New Testament is a free gift for those who believe in Jesus: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16); "Whoever believes in him [God's Son] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one

Gary R. Habermas, *Ancient Evidence for the Life of Jesus* (Nashville,: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984), p. 64.

²² Cited in *The Biblical World*, p. 405.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ *Teachings of Silvanus*, 85.24-106.14, in Nag Hammadi Library, pp. 347-356: cited by Pagels, *Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Random House. 1979). p. 127.

and only Son" (John 3:18); "Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40b); "I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life" (John 6:47); "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies" (John 11:25).

4) The Gnostic Gospels portray Jesus as a "Gnostic Revealer" and not as Christ the Savior and Redeemer. In the New Testament, when Jesus asked Peter, "Who do you say I am?" (Matt. 16:15), Peter rightly responded, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (v. 16). In The Gospel of Thomas, however, Jesus and the disciples are portrayed in a much different light:

Jesus said to his disciples, "Compare me to someone and tell Me whom I am like." Simon Peter said to Him, "You are like a righteous angel." Matthew said to Him, "You are like a wise philosopher." Thomas said to Him, "Master, my mouth is wholly incapable of saying whom You are like." Jesus said, "I am not your master. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring which I have measured out." And He took him and withdrew and told him three things. When Thomas returned to his companions, they asked him, "What did Jesus say to you?" Thomas said to them, "If I tell you one of the things which he told me, you will pick up stones and throw them at me; a fire will come out of the stones and burn you up."²⁵

--¹ The Gospel of Thomas, Saying 13, Cited in The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 119.

F.F. Bruce, a noted Bible scholar who has done significant research on the Nag Hammadi documents, detects Gnostic elements in this encounter: "Here the answers [to Jesus' question] are attempts to depict Jesus as the Gnostic Revealer. Those who have imbibed the gnosis which he imparts (the 'bubbling spring' which he has spread abroad) are not his servants but his friends, and therefore 'Master' is an unsuitable title for them to give him."²⁶

As for the three words Jesus secretly uttered to Thomas, Bruce says these words conveyed to Thomas Jesus' hidden identity and "are probably the three secret words on which, according to the Naassenes, the existence of the world depended: Kaulakau, Saulasau, Zeesar."²⁷ Jesus as a Gnostic Revealer is often portrayed as communicating secret things to one or more disciples in the Gnostic Gospels. How unlike this is to the New Testament Jesus who openly communicated His teachings to all who would listen.

5) The Gnostic Gospels cannot properly be called gospels. Neither The Gospel of Truth nor The Gospel of Philip, as case examples, contain an orderly account of the birth, life, deeds, death, and resurrection of Christ. Both lack Old Testament background, ethical exhortations, and end-time eschatology. Ignorance is said to be the primary culprit of man's condition, not sin.²⁸ Therefore, in no sense of the word can these documents be properly referred to as gospels.

²⁶ F. F. Bruce, *Jesus & Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: World Missions. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.. 1974), p. 118.

²⁷ Bruce, p. 118.

²⁸ *The Biblical World*, p. 405.

The Gospel of Thomas is another case example. F.F. Bruce notes: "No collection of sayings of Jesus can properly be called a Gospel because by its nature it has no passion narrative, and the passion narrative is the core of the essential gospel. But least of all can this collection be called a Gospel because not only does it lack a passion narrative but it includes only one saying (55) remotely hinting at the passion."²⁹ Moreover, unlike the New Testament Gospels, the content of The Gospel of Thomas is "anti-Judaistic, anti-Old Testament, anti-ritualistic and almost antimoralistic."³⁰

By contrast, the four New Testament Gospels all contain orderly accounts of the birth, life, deeds, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. They also point to the glorious "good news" of redemption in Jesus Christ, and are therefore "gospels" in the truest sense of the word.

I. DID THE GOD OF THE BIBLE HAVE A FEMALE GODDESS COMPANION?

Dan Brown's Position:

"Early Jews believed that the Holy of Holies in Solomon's Temple housed not only God but also His powerful female equal, Shekinah." (Page 309)

The Truth of the Matter:

Such a position is absurd, and can be easily answered with two primary points: (1) The Bible steadfastly argues

Bruce, p. 155.

The Biblical World, p. 407.

for monotheism (belief in one God); and (2) the "Shekinah" refers only to the glory of God, not to some "powerful female equal."

1) The Bible steadfastly argues for monotheism (belief in one God). The fact that there is only one true God is the consistent testimony of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. It is like a thread that runs through every page of the Bible. An early Hebrew confession of faith - the Shema - is an example of this consistent emphasis: "Hear, O Israel: The lord our God is one lord" (Deuteronomy 6:4). In a culture saturated with false gods and idols, the Shema would have been particularly meaningful for the Israelites. In the Song of Moses, which Moses recited to the whole assembly of Israel following the "Exodus" from Egypt, we find God's own words worshipfully repeated: "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand" (Deuteronomy 32:39). The God of the Bible is without rival.

After God had made some astonishing promises to David (see the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7:12-16), David responded by offering praise to God: "Wherefore thou art great, O lord God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears" (2 Samuel 7:22). Later, in the form of a psalm, David again praised God with the words, "For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone" (Psalm 86:10).

God Himself positively affirmed through Isaiah the prophet, "I am the first, and I am the last; and beside me there

is no God" (Isaiah 44:6; see also 37:20; 43:10; 45:5, 14, 21-22). God later said, "I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me" (46:9). The Book of Isaiah shows us that God often demonstrated that He alone is God by foretelling the future - something that false pagan gods could never do (46:8-10).

The oneness of God is also often emphasized in the New Testament. In 1 Corinthians 8:4, for example, the apostle Paul asserted that "an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one." James 2:19 likewise says, "Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble." These and a multitude of other verses (for example, John 5:44; 17:3; Romans 3:29-30; 16:27; Galatians 3: 20; Ephesians 4:6; 1 Thessalonians 1:9; 1 Timothy 1:17; 2:5; 1 John 5:20-21; Jude 25) make it absolutely clear that there is one and only one God.

2) The "Shekinah" refers to the glory of God (Exodus 25: 22; Leviticus 16:2; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:14, 15; Psalm 80: 1; Isaiah 37:16; Ezekiel 9:3; 10:18; Hebrews 9:5), not to some "powerful female equal." "Shekinah" comes from a Hebrew word literally meaning "to inhabit." The Evangelical Bible Commentary notes: "The term 'glory' represents the Presence of God dwelling - shkn - in the tabernacle (Ps 26:8; cf. also Exod 25:8; 29:44-46), giving rise to the later theological term Shekinah sometimes called the 'Shek(h)inah Glory.'" The term refers to the visible majesty or glory of the divine presence, especially when resting between the cherubim on the mercy seat, in the Tabernacle, or in the Temple of Solomon. Moses beheld God's Shekinah glory in the Tabernacle (Ex. 40:34-38) just as the priest saw it in the Temple

(1 Kings 8:10-11). In view of this, Dan Brown's assertion that the Shekinah refers to a "powerful female equal" is mind-boggling.

J. DOES GOD'S NAME "YHWH" DERIVE FROM THE TERM "JEHOVAH"?

Dan Brown's Position:

"The Jewish tetragrammaton YHWH - the sacred name of God - in fact derived from Jehovah, an androgynous physical union between the masculine Jah and the pre-Hebraic name for Eve, Havah." (Page 309)

The Truth of the Matter:

Dan Brown's view is flatly false. The term "YHWH" was not derived from "Jehovah"; rather, "Jehovah" was derived from "YHWH." Brown gets it backward! The Old Testament contains the name YHWH (the original Hebrew had only consonants). However, the ancient Jews had a superstitious dread of pronouncing the name YHWH. They felt that if they uttered this name, they might violate the Third Commandment, which deals with taking God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7). So, to avoid the possibility of breaking this commandment, the Jews for centuries substituted the name Adonai (Lord) or some other name in its place whenever they came across it in public readings of Scripture. Eventually, the fearful Hebrew scribes decided to form a new word (Jehovah) by inserting the vowels from Adonai (a-o-a) into the consonants, YHWH. The result was Yahowah, or Jehovah.

K. IS IT TRUE THAT JESUS WAS NOT CONSIDERED TO BE GOD UNTIL THE FOURTH CENTURY WHEN CONSTANTINE "UPGRADED" HIS STATUS FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES?

Dan Brown's Position:

o "Almost everything our fathers taught us about Christ is false." (Page 235)

c- Jesus was a "mortal prophet... a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless. A mortal." (Page 233)

o "Constantine upgraded Jesus' status almost four centuries after Jesus' death." (Page 234)

o "Thousands of documents already existed chronicling His life as a mortal man." (Page 234)

O "Jesus' establishment as the 'Son of God' was officially proposed and voted on by the Council of Nicea.... [and it was] "a relatively close vote at that." (Page 233)

O "Many scholars claim that the early Church literally stole Jesus from His original followers, hijacking His human message, shrouding it in an impenetrable cloak of divinity, and using it to expand their own power." (Page 233)

The Truth of the Matter:

Dan Brown's view is flatly false. The New Testament writers themselves fully recognized that Jesus was absolute deity. One point of evidence is the Apostle Paul's assertion in Colossians 1:16: "For by him [Jesus Christ] all things were created:- things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,

whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him." Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, an Old Testament scholar par excellence. And Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote Colossians 1:16 against the Old Testament backdrop that only Yahweh is the Creator. Indeed, in Isaiah 44:24 Yahweh Himself asserts: "I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself." There can be no doubt that Paul in Colossians 1:16 was affirming Jesus as absolute deity. The same is true of the apostle John, who wrote: "Through him [Jesus Christ] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3).

Along these same lines, in Psalm 102:25-27 we read of Yahweh: "In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. Like clothing you will change them and they will be discarded. But you remain the same, and your years will never end." Significantly, these words are quoted in Hebrews 1:10-12 as being fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. The writer of Hebrews fully recognized the absolute deity of Jesus.

The same is true in regard to Jesus' role as Savior. In the Old Testament we read Yahweh's own words: "I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no Savior" (Isaiah 43:11). So, there is no Savior but Yahweh. In the New Testament, however, Jesus is repeatedly seen to be the Savior of God's people. Indeed, in Titus 2:13 we read of "the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ." There can be no doubt that Jesus is recognized here as absolute deity, centuries before Constantine and the Council of Nicea.

Still further, we see this to be true in terms of Jesus being the God of glory. In Isaiah 6:1-5, the prophet recounts his vision of Yahweh "seated on a throne high and exalted" (verse 1). He said, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord [Yahweh] Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory" (verse 3). Isaiah also quotes Yahweh as saying: "I am the LORD; that is my name! I will not give my glory to another" (42:8). Later, the apostle John - under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit - wrote that Isaiah "saw Jesus' glory" (John 12:41). Yahweh's glory and Jesus' glory are equated. Jesus is the God of glory.

Christ's deity is further confirmed for us in that many of the actions of Yahweh in the Old Testament are performed by Christ in the New Testament. For example, in Psalm 119 we are told about a dozen times that it is Yahweh alone who gives and preserves life. But in the New Testament, Jesus claims this power for Himself: "For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it" (John 5:21). Later in John's Gospel, when speaking to Lazarus's sister Martha, Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die" (John 11:25).

In the Old Testament the voice of Yahweh was said to be "like the roar of rushing waters" (Ezek. 43:2). Likewise, we read of the glorified Jesus in heaven: "His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters" (Rev. 1:15). What is true of Yahweh is just as true of Jesus.

It is also significant that in the Old Testament, Yahweh is described as "an everlasting light," one that would make

the sun, moon, and stars obsolete: "The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. Your sun will never set again, and your moon will wane no more; the LORD will be your everlasting light, and your days of sorrow will end" (Isa. 60: 19-20). Jesus will do the same for the future eternal city in which the saints will dwell forever: "The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp" (Rev. 21:23).

David F. Wells, in his book *The Person of Christ*, points us to even further parallels between Christ and Yahweh:

If Yahweh is our sanctifier (Exod. 31:13), is omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-10), is our peace (Judg. 6:24), is our righteousness (Jer. 23:6), is our victory (Exod. 17:8-16), and is our healer (Exod. 15:26), then so is Christ all of these things (1 Cor. 1: 30; Col. 1:27; Eph. 2:14). If the gospel is God's (1 Thess. 2:2, 6-9; Gal. 3:8), then that same gospel is also Christ's (1 Thess. 3:2; Gal. 1:7). If the church is God's (Gal. 1:13; 1 Cor. 15:9), then that same church is also Christ's (Rom. 16:16). God's Kingdom (1 Thess. 2:12) is Christ's (Eph. 5:5); God's love (Eph. 1:3-5) is Christ's (Rom. 8:35); God's Word (Col. 1:25; 1 Thess. 2:13) is Christ's (1 Thess. 1:8; 4:15); God's Spirit (1 Thess. 4:8) is Christ's (Phil. 1:19); God's peace (Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:9) is Christ's (Col. 3:15; cf. Col. 1:2; Phil. 1:2; 4:7); God's "Day" of judgment (Isa. 13:6) is Christ's "Day" of judgment (Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Cor. 1:8); God's grace (Eph. 2: 8, 9; Col. 1:6; Gal. 1:15) is Christ's grace (1 Thess. 5:28; Gal. 1:6; 6:18); God's salvation (Col. 1:13) is Christ's salvation (1 Thess. 1:10); and God's will (Eph. 1:11; 1 Thess. 4:3; Gal. 1:4)

is Christ's will (Eph. 5:17; cf. 1 Thess. 5:18). So it is no surprise to hear Paul say that he is both God's slave (Rom. 1:9) and Christ's (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10), that he lives for that glory which is both God's (Rom. 5:2; Gal. 1:24) and Christ's (2 Cor. 8:19, 23; cf. 2 Cor. 4:6), that his faith is in God (1 Thess. 1:8, 9; Rom. 4:1-5) and in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3: 22), and that to know God, which is salvation (Gal. 4:8; 1 Thess. 4:5), is to know Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).³¹

Certainly Jesus was worshipped (Greek: *proskuneo*) as God many times according to the Gospel accounts, and He always accepted such worship as perfectly appropriate. (As God, such worship would be appropriate.) Jesus accepted worship from Thomas (John 20:28), the angels (Hebrews 1: 6), some wise men (Matthew 2:11), a leper (Matthew 8:2), a ruler (Matthew 9:18), a blind man (John 9:38), an anonymous woman (Matthew 15:25), Mary Magdalene (Matthew 28:9), and the disciples (Matthew 28: 17). All these verses contain the word *proskuneo*, the same word used of worshipping the Father in the New Testament.

Now, to draw a contrast, consider that when Paul and Barnabas were in Lystra and miraculously healed a man by God's mighty power, those in the crowd shouted, "The gods have come down to us in human form!" (Acts 14:11). When Paul and Barnabas perceived that the people were preparing to worship them, "they tore their clothes and rushed out into the crowd, shouting: 'Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you. We are bringing you good

•" David F. Wells, *The Person of Christ* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1984), pp. 64-65.

news, telling you to turn from these worthless things to the living God, who made heaven and earth and sea and everything in them" (verses 14-15). As soon as they perceived what was happening, they immediately corrected the gross misconception that they were gods.

Unlike Paul and Barnabas, Jesus never sought to correct His followers when they bowed down and worshipped Him. Indeed, Jesus considered such worship as perfectly appropriate. Of course, we would not expect Jesus to try to correct people in worshipping Him if He truly was God in the flesh, as He claimed to be.

The fact that Jesus willingly received (and condoned) worship on various occasions says a lot about His true identity, for it is the consistent testimony of Scripture that only God can be worshipped. Exodus 34:14 tells us: "Do not worship any other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God" (cf. Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 4:10). In view of this, the fact that Jesus was worshipped on numerous occasions shows that He is in fact God. All this took place centuries before Constantine and the Council of Nicea.

Certainly the early church leaders believed Jesus was divine. Ignatius believed Jesus was God manifested "in human form." Clement, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Origin, Novatian, and Cyprian all believed Jesus was God.³²

I could go on and on providing evidences for the fact that Jesus was recognized as absolute deity in the first century

³- David Bercot, ed., *A Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), pp. 93-100.

and later, but I think the above is sufficient to make the point. Allow me now to briefly shift attention to the Council of Nicea.

The Council of Nicea convened in A.D. 325 to settle a dispute regarding the nature of Christ. Arius, a presbyter of Alexandria who was the founder of Arianism, argued that the Son was created from the non-existent, and was of a different substance than the Father. There was a time, Arius argued, when the Son was not. But Christ was the highest of all created beings. Arius heavily promoted his views, sending letters to numerous churches. The effect was that Constantine's empire was suffering religious disharmony and division. To deal with this, Constantine called the Council of Nicea so the bishops could settle the controversy.

Athanasius of Alexandria, the champion of orthodoxy, set forth the correct orthodox (and long-held) view that the Son was the same divine substance as the Father (and hence, was fully divine). Athanasius argued for the eternally personal existence of the Son. The bishops sided with Athanasius because they had long recognized that this was, in fact, the biblical teaching. Seen in this light, Dan Brown is flat wrong in his assertion that Jesus was not recognized as God until the Council of Nicea voted him as God by a "close vote." (By the way, the vote in the council was 300 to 2, hardly a close vote.)

L. WAS JESUS MARRIED TO MARY MAGDALENE?

Dan Brown's Position:

c "The marriage of Jesus and Mary Magdalene is part of the historical record." (Page 245)

❧ The Last Supper practically shouts at the viewer that Jesus and Magdalene were a pair." (Page 244)

o Based on the Gospel of Philip, Brown asserts that "the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?'" (Page 246)

The Truth of the Matter:

There is no mention of Jesus being married prior to the beginning of His three-year ministry. There is no mention of Jesus being married during His three-year ministry. There is no mention of Jesus being married at the crucifixion. There is no mention of Jesus being married at His burial. There is no mention of Jesus being married at His resurrection. In other words, there is no mention of a wife anywhere!

Aside from this deafening silence regarding a wife are theological arguments against Jesus having been married. For example, in 1 Corinthians 9:5 the apostle Paul defends his right to get married if he so chose to do so: "Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas?" Now, if Jesus had been married, surely the apostle Paul would have cited Jesus' marriage as the number one precedent. The fact that he did not mention a wife of Jesus indicates that Jesus was not married.

Some try to argue that since it was expected of every Jewish man to get married, then surely Jesus must have

followed custom and gotten married. Such an argument is unconvincing. First, note that a number of major prophets were never married - including the likes of Jeremiah and John the Baptist. Second, note that there were whole communities of Jews which included unmarried men - such as the Essene community at Qumran. Third, note that Jewish leaders often granted exceptions to the general rule of marriage. It was certainly not an unbending requirement, and hence this general requirement does not constitute proof that Jesus must have been married.

Further, we must note that Jesus' marriage is yet future. He will one day marry the "bride of Christ," which is the church. Revelation 19:7-9 tells us:

Let us rejoice and be glad
and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come,
and his bride has made herself ready.
Fine linen, bright and clean,
was given her to wear."

(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

Clearly, the evidence is against Jesus having gotten married in New Testament times.

Now, Brown's novel claims that a key evidence for Jesus getting married is found in the Gnostic Gospel of Philip. This document, Brown claims, indicates that Mary Magdalene was

the companion of Jesus, and Brown says that in the Aramaic, "companion" means "spouse." Hence, Jesus must have been married. Further, Brown notes that this document indicates that Jesus often kissed Mary Magdalene on the mouth.

There are several points to make in response to this. First, the Gospel of Philip nowhere states that Jesus was married. Further, the document dates to about A.D. 275, several hundred years after the canonical gospels. Therefore, it can hardly be considered a reliable source for information about Jesus. Moreover, this gospel was written not in Aramaic, as Brown claims, but in Greek. Still further, the manuscript for the Gospel of Philip is not whole. In fact, the document says that "Jesus kissed her often on the ..." and then the manuscript is broken at that point. Brown and others have assumed the missing word must be "mouth," but it could just as easily be "head" or "cheek" or even "hand." There is nothing in the context that demands that Jesus kissed Mary on the mouth. Finally, the Gospel of Philip portrays the disciples of Jesus criticizing Mary because Jesus is said to love her more than all the disciples. However, one must assume that if Jesus was really married, no disciple would criticize Mary. The Gospel of Philip thus provides no hard proof that Jesus was married. Nor do any other "gospels" discovered from the second century and after add support to the claim.

Yet another evidence Dan Brown sets forth for Jesus' alleged marriage is Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of The Last Supper. To Jesus' right, we are told, is Mary Magdalene, not John. While it is true that John looks effeminate in The Last Supper, this is quite in keeping with other paintings by this homosexual artist. Indeed, even John the Baptist was portrayed

in a feminine way by Da Vinci. Note that neither John nor John the Baptist have womanly bodies in these paintings.

M. DID JESUS INTEND MARY MAGDALENE TO BE THE HEAD OF THE CHURCH?

Dan Brown's Position:

O "The rock on which Jesus built His Church ... was not Peter ... It was Mary Magdalene." (Page 248)

<> Jesus "intended for the future of His Church to be in the hands of Mary Magdalene." (Page 248)

The Truth of the Matter:

This is wishful thinking. Dan Brown's statement alludes to Matthew 16:18. In this passage Jesus was not even saying that Peter was the rock upon whom the church would be built. Rather, He was saying that Peter's previous confession that Jesus was the Christ would be the rock upon which the church would be built. There are a number of factors in the Greek text that argue against the interpretation that Peter was the rock. First, whenever Peter is referred to in this passage (Matthew 16), it is in the second person ("you"), but "this rock" is in the third person (verse 18). Moreover, "Peter" (petros) is a masculine singular term and rock" (petra) is a feminine singular term. Hence, they do not have the same referent. What is more, the same authority Jesus gave to Peter (Matthew 16:18) is later given to all the apostles (Matthew 18:18). So Peter is not unique.

Ephesians 2:20 affirms that the church is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus

himself as the capstone." Two things are clear from this: (1) all the apostles, not just Peter, are the foundation of the church; (2) the only one who was given a place of uniqueness or prominence was Christ, the capstone. Indeed, Peter himself referred to Christ as "the cornerstone" of the church (1 Peter 2:7) and the rest of believers as "living stones" (verse 4) in the superstructure of the church. There can only be one head of the church, and that is Jesus Christ. Ephesians 5:23 tells us that "Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior" (see also Col. 1:18).

N. WAS SEX A MEANS OF KNOWING AND EXPERIENCING GOD IN BIBLICAL TIMES? DID THE CHURCH DEMONIZE SEX IN ORDER TO STAY IN POWER?

Dan Brown's Position:

c "For the early church, mankind's use of sex to commune directly with God posed a serious threat to the Catholic power base. It left the Church out of the loop, undermining their self-proclaimed status as the sole conduit to God. For obvious reasons, they worked hard to demonize sex and recast it as a disgusting and sinful act. Other major religions did the same." (Page 309)

o The sex act enables one to "achieve gnosis - knowledge of the divine." (Page 308)

O Sex is "a mystical, spiritual act... [in which one can] find that spark of divinity that man can only achieve through union with the sacred feminine." (Page 310)

C The male "could achieve a climactic instant when his mind went totally blank and he could see God." (Page 309)

o "The natural sexual union between man and woman through which each became spiritually whole ... had been recast as a shameful act." (Page 125)

o "Holy men... now feared natural sexual urges as the work of the devil." (Page 125)

The Truth of the Matter:

There are two primary responses to this claim: (1) The church has not recast sex as a shameful act; and (2) Sex was never intended as a means of achieving "gnosis."

1) The church has not recast sex as a shameful act. Sex within marriage is good (see Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:5; 1 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 5:31). Sex was a part of God's "good" creation. Indeed, God created sex and "everything created by God is good" (1 Timothy 4:4). But it is good only within the confines of the marriage relationship (1 Corinthians 7:2), which He Himself ordained (see Hebrews 13:4). The Song of Solomon indicates that God desires married people to have truly fulfilling sex.

Christians, however, are to abstain from fornication (Acts 15:20). Paul said that the body is not for fornication and that a man should flee it (1 Corinthians 6:13,18). Certainly the sex ritual depicted in *The Da Vinci Code* (a copulating couple surrounded by chanting people) constitutes a form of fornication and is thus condemned by God.

Scripture is quite clear: "For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person - such a man is an idolater - has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of

such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient" (Eph. 5:5-6).

2) Sex was never intended as a means of achieving "gnosis." Man is not to seek revelation or knowledge in altered states of consciousness related to the sex act, but rather from God's Word. Scripture alone is the supreme and infallible authority for the church and the individual believer. Jesus always used Scripture as the final court of appeal in every matter under dispute. We must do the same.

Instead of a view that says individuals can receive individual insights from God during sexual ecstasy, Scripture indicates that a definitive body of truth was objectively communicated to man. This is why Jude 3 admonishes us to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." In the Greek text, the definite article "the" preceding "faith" points to the one and only faith; there is no other. "The faith" refers to the apostolic teaching and preaching which was regulative upon the church (see Acts 6:7; Gal. 1:23; 1 Tim. 4:1).

This body of truth is referred to in Jude 3 as that which was "once for all delivered to the saints." The word translated "once for all" (Greek: *apax*) refers to something that has been done for all time, something that never needs repeating. The revelatory process was finished after this "faith" had "once for all" been delivered.

The word "delivered" here is an aorist passive participle, indicating an act that was completed in the past with no continuing element. There would be no new "faith" or body of truth communicated through people in sexual ecstasy.

O. DID THE CHURCH PROPAGATE LIES THAT DEVALUED FEMALES AND TIPPED THE SCALES IN FAVOR OF THE MASCULINE?

Dan Brown's Position:

"Powerful men in the early Christian church 'conned' the world by propagating lies that devalued the female and tipped the scales in favor of the masculine." (Page 124)

The Truth of the Matter:

This is nonsense. God equally values both men and women. In a Jewish culture where women were discouraged from studying the law, Jesus taught women right alongside men as equals (Matt. 14:21; 15:38). And when He taught, He often used women's activities to illustrate the character of the kingdom of God, such as baking bread (Luke 13:20, 21), grinding corn (Luke 17:35), and sweeping the house to find a lost coin (Luke 15:8-10). Some Jewish rabbis taught that a man should not speak to a woman in a public place, but Jesus not only spoke to a woman (who, incidentally, was a Samaritan) but also drank from her cup in a public place (John 4:1-30). The first person He appeared to after resurrecting from the dead was Mary and not the male disciples (John 20). Clearly, Jesus' high view of women is utterly at odds with that of the Gnostic Gospels.

Further, God created both men and women in the image of God (Genesis 1:26). Christian men and women are positionally equal before God (Galatians 3:28).

It is interesting to observe that while God is referred to in the Bible as "Father" (and never "Mother"), some of His

actions are occasionally described in feminine terms. For example, Jesus likened God to a loving and saddened mother hen crying over the waywardness of her children (Matthew 23:37-39). God is also said to have "given birth" to Israel (Deuteronomy 32:18).

Now, it is important to understand that God is not a gender being as humans are. He is not of the male sex, per se. The primary emphasis in God being called "Father" is that He is personal. Unlike the dead and impersonal idols of paganism, the true God is a personal being with whom we can relate. In fact, we can even call Him "Abba" (which loosely means "daddy"). That is how intimate a relationship we can have with Him.

I must point out that if any documents denigrate women and portray them as secondary and defective beings, it is the Gnostic documents. In Saying 114 of The Gospel of Thomas,

Simon Peter is portrayed as saying to Jesus, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life." Jesus responded: "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven."³³

Among the Gnostics, women were viewed as woefully inferior beings. In fact, women could be "saved," the Gnostics taught, only by a return to maleness. Bible scholar Edwin Yamauchi tells us that Jesus' response to Peter in Saying 114 "refers to the ultimate reunification of the sexes, as the

³³ The Gospel of Thomas, in The Nag Hammadi Library, p. 130.

Gnostics maintained that the separation of the sexes was responsible for the origin of evil."³⁴ F.F. Bruce provides further insight on the Gnostic view:

Jesus' promise that [Mary] will become a man, so as to gain admittance to the kingdom of heaven, envisages the reintegration of the original order, when Adam was created male and female (Genesis 1:27). Adam was "the man" as much before the removal of Eve from his side as after (Genesis 2:18-25). Therefore, when the primal unity is restored and death is abolished, man will still be man (albeit more perfectly so), but woman will no longer be woman; she will be reabsorbed into man.³⁵

It is thus truly amazing that Dan Brown tries to position Christianity as a persecutor of women and the Gnostics as women - supporters. The truth is just the opposite!

CONCLUSION

In this brief apologetic critique, we have seen that even though Dan Brown claims his book is based on fact, his "facts" turn out to be sheer fiction. His theory is based on bogus documents; he misrepresents and misinterprets history and theology; he is woefully guilty of revisionism; he uses poor logic; he often makes misstatements; he engages in wild exaggerations and speculations; and hence - understandably - he draws flawed conclusions. Crash goes *The Da Vinci Code!*

³⁴ Yamauchi, p. 186.

³⁵ Bruce, p. 154.

A Movement for National Rebirth: A Tentative Blueprint Re-engineering Filipino Ways and Values

TONY F. ROXAS

Introduction

The global clamor for Filipino nurses is a phenomenon that nursing skills or techniques alone cannot explain. The reason is that all nursing schools in the world teach the same science and art of nursing care. The universal demand for Filipino nurses, therefore, is really an acknowledgement of and a tribute to the caring and loving heart of the Filipino. It is the whole world, and not just the sick and the disabled, that is now aware of how much the Filipino gives importance to the *personal* needs of a human being. It has become evident that the Filipino heart is what the materialistic world now hungers for.

Yet it is this same heart which when not fashioned correctly triggers our downfall in practically all aspects of our

national life, be it social, economic, political, judicial, professional, or religious.

In short, while our culture is rich with outstanding qualities that are very human, it is in many ways *too human*. There is need, therefore, to guide and regulate this '*excess of humanity*' by supplying what is lacking in our culture in order to enrich and strengthen it, if we are to survive and grow and mature as a people.

The Problems

The first problem is that to a great extent, our culture is neither based on nor driven by *principles*. It is largely driven by *personal relationships*.

This is the reason why in countless instances wherein the crucial principles of *truth* and *justice* should prevail, such principles end up displaced and negated by the overpowering *utang na loob*, *pakikisama* and *hiya*.

In short, our culture is driven mainly by *RELATIONAL* values (*Utang na Loob*, *Pakikisama*, *Hiya*), and not by *PRINCIPLED* values (Truth and Justice, etc). The tragic result is that without the guidance and the driving force of principles, our culture becomes *too human* and, therefore, easy prey to corruption and the greater danger of feeling helpless and hopeless to change for the better as a people.

The way out of this problem, therefore, is to re-engineer our Filipino ways and values by infusing *fundamental and universal moral principles* into our way of life that will serve as solid guides and strong driving forces of our culture as a people. Thus will the '*excess of humanity*' in us be put

under control as our relational values get re-directed to serving, and not working against, principles of truth and justice, and other principles that dignify, and not degrade, the human being.

The other problem we have as a people is that *we do not have a strong sense of community or nationhood and love of country*. We tend to think in terms of *self-interests* and *tribal interests*. Hence the *Ako Muna bago Kayo* and the *Tayo-tayo Muna bago Sila* mentality.

This absence or lack of a sense of community or nationhood is clearly seen from the ordinary problems of vehicle drivers' refusal to give in during peak traffic hours to the more serious problems of *collusion* among doctors and lawyers refusing to protect and uphold the rights of patients or clients against colleagues who are clearly guilty of criminal neglect or malpractice. Again, this cultural defect is seen in cases of unnecessary hoarding of foodstuffs and goods to the detriment of the general public, and especially in cases where members of relief organizations divert for their own personal use or gain goods donated to victims of natural disasters.

Some Solutions and Strategies

It is a given in nature that *all* men seek *truth* and *justice*. This *natural* or *innate affinity* for and the *pursuit* of these universal values properly belong to all men - whatever the race, culture, or historical setting - in so far as they ALL SHARE a COMMON RATIONAL NATURE. In cases, therefore where MAN-MADE customs codes of behavior, or culture hinder, retard, or suppress what is NATURAL and

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It is a given in nature that *all* men seek *truth* and *justice*. This *natural* or *innate affinity* for and the *pursuit* of these universal values properly belong to all men - whatever the race, culture, or historical setting - in so far as they ALL SHARE a COMMON RATIONAL NATURE. In cases, therefore where MAN-MADE customs codes of behavior, or culture hinder, retard, or suppress what is NATURAL and

NECESSARY a CLASH between NATURE and NURTURE occurs. The result is that a people caught in this situation will always find themselves confused because undefined and dissatisfied because unfulfilled.

Such is what is happening to us as a people. Our efforts to attain national rebirth, therefore, should be riveted mainly to *subordinating* our homegrown *relational values*, in themselves good and praiseworthy, to universal moral values in such a way that they get *conditioned to* HABITUALLY *serve*, and *not oppose* or *negate*, the cause of truth and justice, and other universal values that bind together not only all Filipinos, but all men and all races as well. This way we can attain the *PLENITUDE OF OUR FULFILLMENT both as human beings and as Filipinos*. In short *Nurture IN THE SERVICE of Nature*.

Re-engineering Filipino ways and values must begin then with the three basic centers of values formation: I. The Home; II. The School; and III. The Church (whatever the religion may be), and a fourth highly influential source of values; IV. Media.

I. Some Strategies for the Home

a) The First Problem - The Need for Universal Guiding Principles

1. Campaigns for Parental Education would greatly help modern parents understand and appreciate better the obligations that the *totality* of parenthood imposes on them. The tendency to view the parents-to-children relationship as limited to begetting (biological) and providing *only* for

material needs (financial) to the *exclusion* of providing correct moral values and guidance for children should be highlighted and corrected.

2. Parents' groups like PTAs could be targeted by schools, the Church, and some NGOs.

3. Closer coordination between the home and the school on the formation of moral values and virtues would greatly help children as they progress in their schooling. Striving for excellence in their studies *and* their responsibilities at home would be a good start for holding them *accountable* for their actions, disposing them to uphold truth and fairness (justice) and being amiable.

4. Concerned sectors of electronic and broadcast media may also produce telenovelas or radio drama series with *mass* appeal but with expertly crafted *subtle* hints of the need for moral uprightness, without sounding moralistic. But what must be glaringly evident in such productions is the absence of excessive violence and unnecessary sex scenes, the big audience appeal of which was proven years ago by the telenovela *Marimar* and *Maria del Barrio*.

*b) The Second Problem - The Absence / Lack of a
Sense of Nationhood & The Need for Love of
Country*

Included in the campaigns for educating parents shall be an awareness program on the tremendous treasures of our country, both natural and cultural. Emphasis shall be on the positive aspects of our people's qualities: their love and devotion to family and respect for elders, their love of friend-

ship, their kindness to strangers, their islanders' resiliency, toughness and innovativeness against formidable odds, their trust in God in the midst of hardships and danger, their talents in and love for music and the arts, their cheerfulness and sense of humor even in adversity, and the universally acclaimed caring and loving heart of the Filipino, and the like, all of which will instill in them some pride in being Filipino, which they shall impart to their children.

Note: Utmost care should be taken to insure that no partisan political preferences or bias are expressed, directly or indirectly, in this or in any other portion of parental education.

II. Same Strategies for the School

a) The First Problem - The Need for Universal Guiding Principles

1. Schools must emphasize formation of moral values and character, and not limit efforts to purely or mostly intellectual or academic matters;

- 1-a) some schools now integrate moral values in almost all subjects being taught so that values formation is interwoven into the various subjects;
- 1-b) schools and homes must coordinate in the moral character formation of students (see II-A-1a and 1-A-3);
- 1-c) respect for truth and justice can begin by emphasizing to the students the need to strive for excellence (within the students' capacity) in their subjects *and* striving to live harmoniously with

all members of the home, holding them *fully accountable* for how they perform in school and at home (see I-A-3);

2. Schools must emphasize the importance of strong family ties, of filial respect for parents and elders, and must show the way by avoiding excessive assignments that overwhelm both students and parents depriving them of much needed time for bonding, a necessary prerequisite to enable parents to teach and monitor their children's moral character formation;

b) The Second Problem - Lack of a Sense of Nationhood and Love of Country

1. Schools should have subjects and/or activities that emphasize the importance of teamanship and the need to sacrifice oneself for the benefit of the team or the class, whenever needed. This should progress eventually to a sense of nationhood, and later to the students' awareness of the need to sacrifice oneself for love of country.

2. Since love of country is not learned overnight, schools must inculcate this in students from childhood, and parents must cooperate in this undertaking (see I-B).

3. Schools shall emphasize the tremendous natural endowments we have - climate, natural resources, a loving, daring and gifted people, and all the positive qualities we have that will make young students love our country and *be proud of being Filipinos*.

III. Some Strategies for the Church

Since the Church must strive to unite most, if not all, Filipinos in the movement for a national rebirth, it must not alienate non-Catholics, but rather should work with all faiths in an ecumenical spirit to attain the desired national objective. Therefore, the Church must focus on both those fundamental universal values and our distinctive Filipino values earlier mentioned that *we all have in common*, and should prudently avoid antagonizing non-Catholics with doctrinal matters. However, for Catholics, and Catholics alone, vital doctrinal matters that may enrich Catholic Filipino moral culture may be included.

a) *The First Problem - The Need for Universal Guiding Principles*

1. Lay leaders should undergo spiritual formation programs that will help them *internalize* fundamental and universal moral values, including Catholic teachings on faith and morals for Catholic-to-Catholic interaction for moral rebirth. Ingraining moral values via *situational* scenarios would be most effective;

2. See I-A-1.

3. See I-A-2.

4. Whenever parents of economic classes D and E resist values formation because of abject poverty, the BECs or other grass-roots church organizations should link up with NGOs that teach productive skills and other groups that extend micro-financing. As economic needs are met, moral values formation should progress.

5. The Church should require the upgrading of pedagogical skills of religion teachers in Catholic schools so that teachings on faith and morals, including fundamental universal values, are *internalized* by students as they progress in their grade levels and studies. Teaching moral values by way of *situational* scenarios of daily life requiring the exercise of moral virtues would greatly help. Failure to make students internalize moral values can only lead to oral morality.

6. The Church shall require Catholic schools to emphasize the formation of moral values, not just academic competence (see II-A-1 & 2). This is so crucial because if the Church does not do this, *no one else will!*

b) The Second Problem - Lack /Absence of A Sense of Nationhood and Love of Country

1. The Church shall require its schools to emphasize the need for students to love our country, citing our God-given gifts (see **I-B** and **II-B-1**, 2, and 3)

2. The Church shall require its schools to emphasize the need for children to love, respect and *serve* their parents, and strive for harmony in the home, as required by natural justice, confirmed and mandated by the 4th commandment, and the virtue of charity. Close coordination between home and school would greatly help in this regard.

IV. Some Strategies for Media

Generally speaking, the media practitioner in our country strives to inform, enlighten or entertain the public. As such,

therefore, he *influences*, for good or ill. Since no one is exempted from the obligation to uphold truth and justice, it follows that any media practitioner must exercise and hone his craft in a way that does not impair anyone's rights in regard to truth and justice. In practice though, the logic is one thing. Living that logic is another.

Given the realities of media practice in our county, it would help the movement for a national rebirth to carry out the following:

1. Journalists known for probity and excellence in their craft should contribute their efforts to inspiring and guiding young campus journalists both in high school and college levels thru seminars, workshops, or courses in journalism;

2. In such seminars, emphasis should be laid on universal moral and ethical norms of responsible and dignified journalism;

3. To ensure the widest audience coverage of talks or seminars of these icons in journalism, such sessions should be recorded on video, copied on VHS or CDs, with the speakers' consent, and distributed to as many schools as possible to reach the biggest number of young campus journalists around the country;

4. Whenever possible, principled journalists should strive, whether alone or in company, to establish their own publications, as the Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism has done;

5. For reforms in media entertainment, see I-A-4.

Conclusion

Our desire to change as a people has been a perennial longing. And yet in the past one hundred years or so, there has not been a single sustained nationwide movement for a genuine rebirth of our people. Perhaps this is due to the absence or lack of a clear consensus on what aspects of our moral culture ought to be changed and what solutions ought to be employed. But whatever the number or complexity of reasons, the fact is that our moral behavioral problems as a people persist, and can only get worse if no collective action is taken on them.

The present tentative blueprint of a movement for national rebirth can only be one of the many more that will pour in as soon as the movement commences and progresses. These are all to be expected because they are necessary. In fact, the four basic influence centers of our moral behavior, the home, the school, the Church and media will have to formulate their own respective *action programs* that are peculiar to each one's needs, without losing sight of their interdependence on one another, under the all-embracing objective of making our homegrown relational values *more spontaneously* receptive to and supportive of universal moral principles.

To be clear, it is in no way implied that Filipinos do not or cannot see what is true or just when confronted by it. Obviously, we all can. But while we recognize the truth when we see it, we as a people are not willing to accept what it may *COST* us. Will it mean the loss of a friend to whom we owe a big favor (*utang na loob*)? Will it mean offending peers (*pakikisama*)? If only prudent fraternal correction or persuasion could *ALWAYS* produce a win-win situation for

both homegrown relational and universal moral values, there would be no problem. But this is not so. This is why corruption flourishes in our land, because our moral values are on the wane.

The success of this movement will depend on the combined efforts of the entire spectrum of Filipino society. The private and public sectors will both have significant and indispensable roles to play. But it is the social sector that must lead the way in concentrating renewal efforts on the four most influential and basic social institutions that mold the moral culture of our nation.

It also goes without saying that, to ensure the credibility of the movement, those who contribute their share to make it succeed would do well to resist that strong temptation to sink into or digress to partisan politics with all its divisive effects. Politics and politicians come and go, but the soul and culture of a people stay. And when a nation after much soul-searching seeks its moral and cultural rebirth, it yearns for a fulfillment that *infinitely transcends* the fleeting nature of vested interests.

National rebirth cannot be attained in a lifetime. Perhaps not even in three lifetimes, which might be blessed by then with the emergence of only the first fruits. This is because it takes a very long and painful process to undo flawed patterns of behavior and practices handed down to us by sheer inertia of the past. Besides, it also takes a long and determined struggle to adopt the new behavioral habits that must replace old ones. And yet we must pursue and stay this course as a people for there is no other reasonable alternative. Failure is self-destructive. Let us then begin by taking the first step in that proverbial journey of a thousand miles.

Message for Lent 2006

†POPE BENEDICT XVI

"Jesus, at the sight of the crowds, was moved with
pity" (Mt 9:36)

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

Lent is a privileged time of interior pilgrimage towards Him Who is the fount of mercy. It is a pilgrimage in which He Himself accompanies us through the desert of our poverty, sustaining us on our way towards the intense joy of Easter. Even in the "valley of darkness" of which the Psalmist speaks (Ps 23:4), while the tempter prompts us to despair or to place a vain hope in the work of our own hands, God is there to guard us and sustain us. Yes, even today the Lord hears the cry of the multitudes longing for joy, peace, and love. As in every age, they feel abandoned. Yet, even in the desolation of misery, loneliness, violence and hunger that indiscriminately afflict children, adults, and the elderly, God does not allow darkness to prevail. In fact, in the words of my beloved Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, there is a "divine limit imposed

upon evil", namely, mercy (Memory and Identity, pp. 19ff.). It is with these thoughts in mind that I have chosen as my theme for this Message the Gospel text: "Jesus, at the sight of the crowds, was moved with pity" (Mt 9:36).

In this light, I would like to pause and reflect upon an issue much debated today: the question of development. Even now, the compassionate "gaze" of Christ continues to fall upon individuals and peoples. He watches them, knowing that the divine "plan" includes their call to salvation. Jesus knows the perils that put this plan at risk, and He is moved with pity for the crowds. He chooses to defend them from the wolves even at the cost of His own life. The gaze of Jesus embraces individuals and multitudes, and he brings them all before the Father, offering Himself as a sacrifice of expiation.

Enlightened by this Paschal truth, the Church knows that if we are to promote development in its fullness, our own "gaze" upon mankind has to be measured against that of Christ. In fact, it is quite impossible to separate the response to people's material and social needs from the fulfillment of the profound desires of their hearts. This has to be emphasized all the more in today's rapidly changing world, in which our responsibility towards the poor emerges with ever greater clarity and urgency. My venerable Predecessor, Pope Paul VI, accurately described the scandal of underdevelopment as an outrage against humanity. In this sense, in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, he denounced "the lack of material necessities for those who are without the minimum essential for life, the moral deficiencies of those who are mutilated by selfishness" and "oppressive social structures, whether

due to the abuses of ownership or to the abuses of power, to the exploitation of workers or to unjust transactions" (ibid., 21). As the antidote to such evil, Paul VI suggested not only "increased esteem for the dignity of others, the turning towards the spirit of poverty, cooperation for the common good, the will and desire for peace", but also "the acknowledgement by man of supreme values, and of God, their source and their finality" (ibid.). In this vein, the Pope went on to propose that, finally and above all, there is "faith, a gift of God accepted by the good will of man, and unity in the charity of Christ" (ibid.). Thus, the "gaze" of Christ upon the crowd impels us to affirm the true content of this "complete humanism" that, according to Paul VI, consists in the "fully-rounded development of the whole man and of all men" (ibid., 42). For this reason, the primary contribution that the Church offers to the development of mankind and peoples does not consist merely in material means or technical solutions. Rather, it involves the proclamation of the truth of Christ, Who educates consciences and teaches the authentic dignity of the person and of work; it means the promotion of a culture that truly responds to all the questions of humanity.

In the face of the terrible challenge of poverty afflicting so much of the world's population, indifference and self-centered isolation stand in stark contrast to the "gaze" of Christ. Fasting and almsgiving, which, together with prayer, the Church proposes in a special way during the Lenten Season, are suitable means for us to become conformed to this "gaze". The examples of the saints and the long history of the Church's missionary activity provide invaluable indications of the most effective ways to support development. Even in this era of global interdependence, it is clear that no

economic, social, or political project can replace that gift of self to another through which charity is expressed. Those who act according to the logic of the Gospel live the faith as friendship with God Incarnate and, like Him, bear the burden of the material and spiritual needs of their neighbours. They see it as an inexhaustible mystery, worthy of infinite care and attention. They know that he who does not give God gives too little; as Blessed Teresa of Calcutta frequently observed, the worst poverty is not to know Christ. Therefore, we must help others to find God in the merciful face of Christ. Without this perspective, civilization lacks a solid foundation.

Thanks to men and women obedient to the Holy Spirit, many forms of charitable work intended to promote development have arisen in the Church: hospitals, universities, professional formation schools, and small businesses. Such initiatives demonstrate the genuine humanitarian concern of those moved by the Gospel message, far in advance of other forms of social welfare. These charitable activities point out the way to achieve a globalization that is focused upon the true good of mankind and, hence, the path towards authentic peace. Moved like Jesus with compassion for the crowds, the Church today considers it her duty to ask political leaders and those with economic and financial power to promote development based on respect for the dignity of every man and woman. An important litmus test for the success of their efforts is religious liberty, understood not simply as the freedom to proclaim and celebrate Christ, but also the opportunity to contribute to the building of a world enlivened by charity. These efforts have to include a recognition of the central role of authentic religious values in responding to man's deepest concerns, and in supplying the ethical moti-

vation for his personal and social responsibilities. These are the criteria by which Christians should assess the political programmes of their leaders.

We cannot ignore the fact that many mistakes have been made in the course of history by those who claimed to be disciples of Jesus. Very often, when having to address grave problems, they have thought that they should first improve this world and only afterwards turn their minds to the next. The temptation was to believe that, in the face of urgent needs, the first imperative was to change external structures. The consequence, for some, was that Christianity became a kind of moralism, 'believing' was replaced with 'doing'. Rightly, therefore, my Predecessor, Pope John Paul II, of blessed memory, observed: "The temptation today is to reduce Christianity to merely human wisdom, a pseudo-science of well-being. In our heavily secularized world, a 'gradual secularization of salvation' has taken place, so that people strive for the good of man, but man who is truncated... We know, however, that Jesus came to bring integral salvation" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 11).

It is this integral salvation that Lent puts before us, pointing towards the victory of Christ over every evil that oppresses us. In turning to the Divine Master, in being converted to Him, in experiencing His mercy through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we will discover a "gaze" that searches us profoundly and gives new life to the crowds and to each one of us. It restores trust to those who do not succumb to skepticism, opening up before them the perspective of eternal beatitude. Throughout history, even when hate seems to prevail, the luminous testimony of His love is

never lacking. To Mary, "the living fount of hope" (Dante Alighieri, *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 12), we entrust our Lenten journey, so that she may lead us to her Son. I commend to her in particular the multitudes who suffer poverty and cry out for help, support, and understanding. With these sentiments, I cordially impart to all of you a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 29 September, 2005.

Message for the 92nd World Day of Migrants and Refugees (2006)

†POPE BENEDICT XVI

"Migrations: a sign of the times"

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Forty years ago the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council was closed, whose rich teaching covers many areas of ecclesial life. In particular the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* made a careful analysis of the complexities of the world today, seeking the ways best suited to bring the Gospel message to the men and women of today.

To this end the Council Fathers in response to the appeal of Bl. John XXIII undertook to examine the signs of the times and to interpret them in the light of the Gospel so as to offer the new generations the possibility of responding adequately to the eternal questions about this life and the life "to come and about just social relations" (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 4).

One of the recognizable signs of the times today is undoubtedly migration, a phenomenon which during the century just ended can be said to have taken on structural characteristics, becoming an important factor of the labour market worldwide, a consequence among other things of the enormous drive of globalization.

Naturally in this "sign of the times" various factors play a part. They include both national and international migration, forced and voluntary migration, legal and illegal migration, subject also to the scourge of trafficking in human beings.

Nor can the category of foreign students, whose numbers increase every year in the world, be forgotten.

With regard to those who emigrate for economic reasons, a recent fact deserving mention is the growing number of women involved ("feminization"). In the past it was mainly men who emigrated, although there were always women too, but these emigrated in particular to accompany their husbands or fathers or to join them wherever they were.

Today, although numerous situations of this nature still exist, female emigration tends to become more and more autonomous. Women cross the border of their homeland alone in search of work in another country. Indeed, it often happens that the migrant woman becomes the principal source of income for her family. It is a fact that the presence of women is especially prevalent in sectors that offer low salaries. If, then, migrant workers are particularly vulnerable, this is even more so in the case of women.

The most common employment opportunities for women, other than domestic work, consist in helping the elderly, caring

for the sick and work in the hotel sector. These, too, are areas where Christians are called to dedicate themselves to assuring just treatment for migrant women out of respect for their femininity in recognition of their equal rights.

In this context it is necessary to mention trafficking in human beings - especially women - which flourishes where opportunities to improve their standard of living or even to survive are limited. It becomes easy for the trafficker to offer his own "services" to the victims, who often do not even vaguely suspect what awaits them. In some cases there are women and girls who are destined to be exploited almost like slaves in their work, and not infrequently in the sex industry, too.

Though I cannot here closely examine the analysis of the consequences of this aspect of migration, I make my own the condemnation voiced by John Paul II against "the widespread hedonistic and commercial culture which encourages the systematic exploitation of sexuality" (*Letter of Pope John Paul II to Women*, 29 June 1995, n. 5). This outlines a whole programme of redemption and liberation from which Christians cannot withdraw.

Speaking of the other category of migrants - asylum seekers and refugees - I wish to underline how the tendency is to stop at the question of their arrival while disregarding the reasons for which they left their native land.

The Church sees this entire world of suffering and violence through the eyes of Jesus, who was moved with pity at the sight of the crowds wandering as sheep without a shepherd (cf. Mt. 9:36). Hope, courage, love and "'creativity'

in charity" (Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, n. 50) must inspire the necessary human and Christian efforts made to help these brothers and sisters in their suffering. Their native Churches will demonstrate their concern by sending pastoral agents of the same language and culture, in a dialogue of charity with the particular Churches that welcome them.

In the light of today's "signs of the times", particular attention should be paid to the phenomenon of foreign students. Thanks among other factors to foreign exchange programmes between universities, especially in Europe, their number is growing, with consequent pastoral problems the Church cannot ignore. This is especially true in the case of students coming from developing countries, whose university experience can become an extraordinary occasion for spiritual enrichment.

As I invoke divine assistance on those who, moved by the desire to contribute to the promotion of a future of justice and peace in the world, spend their energies in the field of pastoral care at the service of human mobility, I impart to all as a sign of affection a special Apostolic Blessing.

From the Vatican, 18 October 2005.

Message for the 40th World Communications Day

fPOPE BENEDICT XVI

*"The Media: A Network for Communication,
Communion and Cooperation"*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

1) In the wake of the fortieth-anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, I am happy to recall its Decree on the Means of Social Communication, *Inter Mirifica*, which in particular recognized the power of the media to influence the whole of human society. The need to harness that power for the benefit of all mankind has prompted me, in this my first message for World Communications Day, to reflect briefly on the idea of the media as a network facilitating communication, communion, and cooperation.

Saint Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, vividly depicts our human vocation to be "sharers in the divine nature" (*Dei*

Verbum, 2): through Christ we have access in one Spirit to the Father; so we are no longer strangers and aliens but citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, growing into a holy temple, a dwelling place for God (cf. Eph 2:18-22). This sublime portrayal of a life of communion engages all aspects of our lives as Christians. The call to be true to the self-communication of God in Christ is in fact a call to recognize his dynamic force within us, which then seeks to spread outwards to others, so that his love can truly become the prevalent measure of the world (cf. *Homily for World Youth Day*, Cologne, 21 August 2005).

2) Technological advances in the media have in certain respects conquered time and space, making communication between people, even when separated by vast distances, both instantaneous and direct. This development presents an enormous potential for service of the common good and "constitutes a patrimony to safeguard and promote" (*Rapid Development*, 10). Yet, as we all know, our world is far from perfect. Daily we are reminded that immediacy of communication does not necessarily translate into the building of cooperation and communion in society.

To inform the consciences of individuals and help shape their thinking is never a neutral task. Authentic communication demands principled courage and resolve. It requires a determination of those working in the media not to wilt under the weight of so much information nor even to be content with partial or provisional truths. Instead it necessitates both seeking and transmitting what is the ultimate foundation and meaning of human, personal and social

existence (cf. *Fides et Ratio*, 5). In this way the media can contribute constructively to the propagation of all that is good and true.

3) The call for today's media to be responsible - to be the protagonist of truth and promoter of the peace that ensues - carries with it a number of challenges. While the various instruments of social communication facilitate the exchange of information, ideas, and mutual understanding among groups, they are also tainted by ambiguity. Alongside the provision of a "great round table" for dialogue, certain tendencies within the media engender a kind of monoculture that dims creative genius, deflates the subtlety of complex thought and undervalues the specificity of cultural practices and the particularity of religious belief. These are distortions that occur when the media industry becomes self-serving or solely profit-driven, losing the sense of accountability to the common good.

Accurate reporting of events, full explanation of matters of public concern, and fair representation of diverse points of view must, then, always be fostered. The need to uphold and support marriage and family life is of particular importance, precisely because it pertains to the foundation of every culture and society (cf. *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11). In cooperation with parents, the social communications and entertainment industries can assist in the difficult but sublimely satisfying vocation of bringing up children, through presenting edifying models of human life and love (cf. *Inter Mirifica*, 11). How disheartening and destructive it is to us all when the opposite occurs. Do not our hearts cry out, most especially, when our

young people are subjected to debased or false expressions of love which ridicule the God-given dignity of every human person and undermine family interests?

4) To encourage both a constructive presence and a positive perception of the media in society, I wish to reiterate the importance of three steps, identified by my venerable predecessor Pope John Paul II, necessary for their service of the common good: formation, participation, and dialogue (cf. *Rapid Development*, 11).

Formation in the responsible and critical use of the media helps people to use them intelligently and appropriately. The profound impact upon the mind of new vocabulary and of images, which the electronic media in particular so easily introduce into society, cannot be overestimated. Precisely because contemporary media shape popular culture, they themselves must overcome any temptation to manipulate, especially the young, and instead pursue the desire to form and serve. In this way they protect rather than erode the fabric of a civil society worthy of the human person.

Participation in the mass media arises from their nature as a good destined for all people. As a public service, social communication requires a spirit of cooperation and co-responsibility with vigorous accountability of the use of public resources and the performance of roles of public trust (cf. *Ethics in Communications*, 20), including recourse to regulatory standards and other measures or structures designed to effect this goal.

Finally, the promotion of dialogue through the exchange of learning, the expression of solidarity and the espousal of peace presents a great opportunity for the mass media which must be recognized and exercised. In this way they become influential and appreciated resources for building the civilization of love for which all peoples yearn.

I am confident that serious efforts to promote these three steps will assist the media to develop soundly as a network of communication, communion and cooperation, helping men, women and children, to become more aware of the dignity of the human person, more responsible, and more open to others especially the neediest and the weakest members of society (cf. *Redemptor Hominis*, 15; *Ethics in Communications*, 4).

In conclusion, I return to the encouraging words of Saint Paul: Christ is our peace. In him we are one (cf. Eph 2:14). Let us together break down the dividing walls of hostility and build up the communion of love according to the designs of the Creator made known through his Son!

From the Vatican, 24 January 2006, the Feast of Saint Francis de Sales.

Pastoral Statement: Renewing Our Public Life Through Moral Values

tANGEL N. LAGDAMEO, D.D.

Beloved People of God

We, your bishops, have collectively discerned in the light of the Gospel what our mass media, our political leaders and, above all, you parishioners in our various dioceses have been telling us. **What clearly emerges is the continued and urgent need for renewal in the public life of our country.**

1. Our Pastoral Situation: What Our People are Saying

We have all observed the failure of political processes to make public servants accountable for wrongdoings. What we have seen instead are acts of evasion and obstruction of the truth, as in the case of the wiretapping and Garcillano tapes controversy. While we acknowledge that patriotic and sincere Filipinos have heeded our call in July 2005 for accountability in public office and sought means for the truth to emerge, we

also witness those who seem to use "the search for truth" as a means of furthering their political ambitions. Pressure is thus brought on the ordinary citizen to take sides on the basis of speculation, whether this be with regard to destabilizing alliances, armed insurgency, or a brewing coup d'etat. Have we become a nation of rumors and untruths?

As a result of all this, there seems to be a paralyzing gridlock in the political sphere, as partisan interests prevail over the demands of the common good. Enough of this destructive politics, we hear our people declare. In this situation of widespread confusion, it is not surprising that apathy and cynicism with regard to politics have taken hold of the minds and hearts of many Filipinos. Tragically, many Filipinos have lost trust in political leaders from left, right, and center, and worse still, in the political institutions themselves which are perceived by many to be corrupted. Among an increasing number of our people, there is a sense of hopelessness about our country and the possibility of genuine reform.

While the economy at the macro-level seems to be moving along, the benefits are not sufficiently shared by the poor. What the people in our dioceses are experiencing and saying informs us that their most immediate and urgent priority is their daily struggle to earn a livelihood. Poverty remains the heaviest burden our people bear. They wonder if the political priorities that preoccupy our leaders are merely "Manila-magnified" problems foisted upon those in the provinces. They are seriously concerned that in 2006 we shall be repeating the same kind of chaotic politics that we all suffered in 2005.

//. *The Root of the Crisis: Erosion of Moral Values*

As bishops, we believe that at the bottom of our political chaos is a crisis of moral values, a crisis of truth and justice, of unity and solidarity for the sake of the common good and genuine peace. Truth has become a victim of political partisanship as well as of transactional politics. Moral accountability and justice for crimes, such as the killings of journalists and labor leaders, are yet to be realized.

Because of this crisis of values in our public life, the common good and the plight of the poor are being ignored. We witness the anguish of poor farmers affected by rising prices of farm inputs and decreasing prices for their products. Indigenous people, farmers and fishermen in our dioceses are filled with anxiety about the negative effects of mining, commercial logging, illegal quarrying and fishing, and the continual threat of displacement from one's ancestral lands. More regrettable is the common knowledge that many of our politicians are behind such ventures that disregard the common good.

As Bishops, we realize that the root cause of our debilitating situation is the erosion of moral values. Its external manifestations are deceit and dishonesty, corruption, manipulation and a deadening preoccupation with narrow political interests, perceived in practically all branches and at all levels of government. Pope Benedict XVI cites St. Augustine's observation that 'a State which is not governed according to justice would be just a bunch of thieves' (*Deus Caritas Est*, 28)

But we also recognize that our situation is not one of utter darkness. We are encouraged and inspired to see so

many good and decent Filipinos, of different faith traditions, working selflessly and sincerely to build up our nation. We see public servants struggling for integrity and the authentic reform of the corrupted institutions they are part of. We acknowledge groups of dedicated laity, religious and clergy, NGOs and various associations, including police and military personnel, giving of themselves to improve the governance, education, health, housing, livelihood and environmental conditions of our people. These people, united by a vision of heroic citizenship, are reasons for hope, even in the midst of the political crisis we find ourselves in.

///. **What We Need to Do**

The mission of the Church includes the renewal of the social order and public life through the teaching and inculcation of the values of the Gospel. Because of the moral dimensions of our political and economic life, "The Church has something to say about specific human situations, individual and communal, national and international." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 521) "Any authentic search for peace", the Holy Father stresses, "must begin with the realization that the problem of truth and untruth is the concern of every man and woman." (*In Truth, Peace*, no. 5) Let us all therefore address the urgent issues facing our country from this moral standpoint:

- We recommend that the search for truth be relentlessly pursued through structures and processes mandated by law and our Constitution, such as the Ombudsman, the Commission on Human Rights, the *Sandigan-bayan*, and Congress itself as well as other citizens'

groups. This requires that such bodies be led and run by credible people, persons of integrity and probity.

- [J] Confidence and trust in our political processes have to be restored. As a first step we strongly urge our political leaders to undertake electoral reforms post-haste. The Commission on Elections has to be transformed into a competent and reliable body beyond reproach. The call for resignation or even prosecution of a number of the Commissioners should not be lightly brushed aside. The electoral process, including counting of votes, needs to be reformed and modernized before the next elections.
- Elections in 2007 should not be cancelled. The Church recognizes that in a democracy power emanates from the people, i.e., that "the subject of political authority is the people considered in its entirety ... This people transfers the exercise of sovereignty to those whom it freely elects ... but it preserves the prerogative ... [of] evaluating those charged with governing, and replacing them when they do not fulfill their functions satisfactorily." (*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, No. 395)
 - While we agree that certain aspects of our Constitution may need amendments and revisions, we do not support hasty efforts to change this fundamental law of the land without the widespread discussion and participation that such changes require. We continue to believe, as we did in our Statement on Charter Change in 2003, that changing the Constitution involving major shifts in the form of government,

requires widespread participation, total transparency, and relative serenity that allows for national discussion and debate. This is best done through a Constitutional Convention. The reasons for constitutional change must be based on the common good rather than on self-serving interests or the interests of political dynasties.

- LJ We reiterate our stand in our July 2005 statement that we do not condone any move resorting to violence or counter-constitutional means in resolving our present crisis. These measures would only bring about new forms of injustice, more hardships, and greater harm in the future.

We are aware that the renewal of the Philippine public life will require the transformation of cultural values and structures, and will require more intensive efforts on the part of the Church. We therefore commit ourselves to the following:

- To adopt a more systematic program of promoting the moral values that are indicated in seven (of the nine) pastoral priorities drawn up at the 2001 National Pastoral Consultation on Church Renewal. These are: integral faith formation; empowerment of the laity towards social transformation; the active presence and participation of the poor in the Church and in society; the family as the focal point of evangelization; the building and strengthening of participatory communities that make up the parish; integral renewal of the clergy and religious; and our journeying with the youth.

- To continue the formation of Basic Ecclesial Communities and other faith-communities at the grassroots, towards a deeper spirituality of heroic Christian citizenship, and towards encouraging the laudable efforts of these communities at nation-building, such as the monitoring of the IRA, bidding of public works projects, etc.
- To promote a spirituality of public service, integrity and stewardship among public servants and citizens' groups alike. These forms of social spirituality should counteract the persistent evils of gambling, drug-pushing, usury, destruction of our environment, and corruption in public office.
- To bring together various concerned citizens' groups that are working for good governance in order to encourage better collaboration among them in the mobilization of the governed to check graft and corruption and to work for better public services.
- To declare this year 2006 as a "Social Concerns Year" under the auspices of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The Social Teachings of the Church, as summarized in the recently-printed *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, may be discussed, internalized, and acted upon in all our dioceses, parishes and Catholic schools.

LJ To accompany our efforts with prayer and penance and a deep trust in the transformative power of God's grace in the lives of individuals as well as of societies. *"Restore us to Thee, O Lord, that we may be restored"* (Lam 5:21)

Conclusion

In all we have been saying here, we, your Bishops, are seeking to be faithful to the Lord's command of love, and his call to his followers to care for all peoples, especially those whom he sees as the "least of my brothers and sisters" (Mt. 25, 40). It is this Gospel mandate we wish to see making a quantitative difference in our efforts at healing and renewing our flawed political culture and corrupted public life. In doing this, we show our solidarity with the poor who suffer most from the present state of public life and politics.

May the love of God in Christ, poured out upon all of us in the Holy Spirit, give us the courage and hope to renew our public life and to build up a truly moral society. And may Mary become our guide and model in this renewed pilgrimage towards Truth, Justice, Freedom and Love, the pillars of genuine peace in our Land.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

tANGEL N. LAGDAMEO, D.D.

Archbishop of Jam

President, CBCP

29 January 2006

A Statement on Mining Issues and Concerns

tANGEL N. LAGDAMEO, D.D.

*"Do not defile the land where you live
and where I dwell"*
(Num. 35:34)

Sisters and Brothers in Christ

We are Pastors. We listen to the voice of the flock and take care of them. In our task to care for them, we reiterate our concern for the Earth.

In 1998, we in the CBCP issued "**A Statement of Concern on the Mining Act of 1995**". We declared that the government mining policy is offering our lands to foreigners with liberal conditions while our people continue to grow in poverty. We stated that the adverse social impact on the affected communities far outweigh the gains promised by mining Trans-National corporations (TNCs). In our statement we also forewarned that the "implementation of the

Mining Act will certainly destroy environment and people and will lead to national unrest."

We reaffirm our stand for the repeal of the Mining Act of 1995. We believe that the Mining Act destroys life. The right to life of people is inseparable from their right to sources of food and livelihood. Allowing the interests of big mining corporations to prevail over people's right to these sources amounts to violating their right to life. Furthermore, mining threatens people's health and environmental safety through the wanton dumping of waste and tailings in rivers and seas.

Our experiences of environmental tragedies and incidents with the mining transnational corporations belie all assurances of sustainable and responsible mining that the Arroyo administration is claiming. Increasing number of mining affected communities, Christians and non-Christians alike, are subjected to human rights violations and economic deprivations. We see no relief in sight.

President Arroyo's "Mining Revitalization Program" is encouraging further the entry and operation of large-scale mining of TNCs. Alarminglly, the mining tenements granted through the program have encroached into seventeen (17) of important biodiversity areas, into thirty-five (35) of national conservation priority areas, and thirty-two (32) of national integrated protected areas. The promised economic benefits of mining by these transnational corporations are outweighed by the dislocation of communities especially among our indigenous brothers and sisters, the risks to health and livelihood and massive environmental damage. Mining areas remain

among the poorest areas in the country such as the mining communities in CARAGA, Bicol and Cordillera Regions. The cultural fabric of indigenous peoples is also being destroyed by the entry of mining corporations.

Moreover, we are apprehensive that the proposed deletion of the nationalist provisions in the Constitution by the Constitutional Commission (CONCOM) can pave the way to the wholesale plunder of our National Patrimony, and undermine our Sovereignty.

- To support, unify and strengthen the struggle of the local Churches and their constituency against all mining projects, and raise the anti-mining campaign at the national level;

LI To support the call of various sectors, especially the Indigenous Peoples, to stop the 24 Priority Mining Projects of the government, and the closure of large-scale mining projects, for example, the Rapu-rapu Polymetallic Project in Albay, HPP Project in Palauan, Didippio Gold-Copper Project in Albay, HPP Project in Palawan, Didippio Gold-Copper Project in Nueva Vizcaya, Tampakan Copper-gold Project in South Cotabato, Canatuan Gold Project in Zamboanga del Norte, and the San Antonio Copper Project in Marinduque, among others;

- To support the conduct of studies on the evil effects of mining in dioceses;

LI To support all economic activities that are life-enhancing and poverty-alleviating.

As we have said in our 1998 statement, "even our best efforts will come to nothing without the help of God, our Creator. We invoke upon you the grace of the Holy Spirit who renews the face of the earth. With gratitude in our hearts we ask the intercession of Mary, the Mother of Jesus and our Mother, to obtain for us a renewed land and a converted people."

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

f ANGEL N. LAGDAMEO, D.D.

Archbishop of Jaro

President, CBCP

29 January 2006

The Religious: Witnesses and Prophets Building Up the Local Church in Asia*

FORLANDO B. QUEVEDO, OMI, DD

Introduction

May I thank the organizers of this important symposium and, in special way, Sr. Mary Walter for inviting me to present some reflections for your kind consideration.

My task, as I see it, is not to develop one or several particular tasks that consecrated persons have to do toward the building up of the local church. I wish, instead, to suggest a perspective, a vision if you will, and some general directions for pastoral ministry in the local church. From this perspective or vision, consecrated persons in Asia could then view their missionary and pastoral tasks.

* Talk delivered to the FABC Symposium on Consecrated Life, July 20, 2005, Hua Hin, Thailand.

Allow me to state this perspective at the very beginning. I am going to suggest that Consecrated Persons see their role as credible and effective witnesses as well as courageous prophets in the building up of the local Church in Asia.

Some Preliminary Notes:

But first a preliminary note on the terms "local" and "particular" church. We usually understand the term "local church" to mean a particular limited ecclesial territory, such as a parish, an apostolic vicariate, prefecture, a diocese or archdiocese. In other words, a physical space in which the church grows. We usually refer to the head of such an ecclesiastical territory as the "local Ordinary." Or perhaps we might even use the term "local church" to mean a regional grouping of dioceses, such as those belonging to a particular "Oriental rite" in a region. This is differentiated from the "universal church, or the church as a whole".

Vatican II uses the term "particular church" (24 times) more than it uses the term "local church (8 times) or a grouping of churches. Thus in Vatican II the two terms are usually used synonymously. However in these reflections I shall use the term "local church".

In this reflection I shall also use the terms consecrated person and Religious interchangeably. Admittedly, members of some societies of apostolic life do not have an explicit commitment to the evangelical counsels (see VC, 11), although they are generally considered "Religious."

A. The Local Church, a Theological and Socio-Cultural Reality.

Many of us would probably understand the "local church" in terms of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and territory, a physical geographical space in which a particular church would grow and prosper. With this understanding we might plan on building the local church by increasing the number of church and Mass attendance, the number of people receiving communion, the number of baptisms especially of adult catechumens, and the number of educational or charitable or social service institutions, and the like. We might also plan on giving more pastoral care to families, children, women, and migrant workers. And of course, we might want to intensify our vocation programs in order to increase the number of seminarians and candidates to the religious life. As a pastoral consequence Religious would be called to build the local church by helping provide or train and form catechists, social service workers, family life workers, teachers, nurses or primary health care workers. Religious would thus have to work not only in their own institutions but also in diocesan socio-pastoral programs, even at the level of formation, coordination, and supervision.

All these pastoral strategies are certainly valid. They are, indeed, necessary in building up the local church. But to limit religious ministry and apostolate to these pastoral strategies would, I believe, I miss the most important point.

A local church is much more than a geographical reality. A local church is a theological and spiritual reality with concrete socio-cultural dimensions. It is after all the insertion

of the mystery of Christ's Church in a local culture. The First Plenary Assembly of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conference (*FABC I*) in 1974 provided a felicitous description of the local church: "...the local church is the realization and the enfleshment of the Body of Christ in a given people, a given place and time" (no. 9). Or even more fully:

"The local church is a church incarnate in a people, a church indigenous and inculturated. And this means concretely a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue with the living traditions, the cultures, the religions - in brief, with all the life-realities of the people in whose midst it has sunk its roots deeply and whose history and life it gladly makes its own" (*Ibid*, no. 12).

B. Evangelization by the Mode of Intuitu ration.

This theological reality of the local church has a fundamental postulate. It presupposes that the message of Christ has to be "truly incarnate in the minds and lives of our people." Therefore, *FABC I* would conclude, "the primary focus of our task of evangelization then, at this time in our history, is the building up of a truly local church" (*Ibid*, no. 9; see also FABC Theological Advisory Commission, *Theses on the Local Church*, Part III, "The Birth, Life and Mission of the Local Church," particularly Theses 5-8). Thirty years after *FABC I* this statement, I believe, is still valid. We have a long way to go in building up the local church. I do think that we are far from being "a church in continuous, humble and loving dialogue... with all the life realities of the people." This task remains the "primary focus" of evangelization.

The key biblical images of the theological and socio-cultural reality of the local Church are the image of the "People of God" in pilgrimage to the Kingdom of God and the image of "the Body of Christ". As God's people the Church is a small flock in Asia. But Christ established it as "a communion of life, love and truth" and took it up as "the instrument for the salvation of all, as the light of the world and the salt of the earth" (LG, 10). In the image of the Body of Christ the local Church is understood in Eucharistic terms: 'Because the bread is one, we, though many, are one body, all of us who partake of the one bread' (1 Cor. 10:17) In this way all of us are made members of his body (cf. 1 Cor. 12:27), 'but severally members one of another' (LG, 7)."

C. Missionary and Pastoral Implications for Religious.

The theological and socio-cultural reality of the local church has significant missionary and pastoral implications on the role of religious:

1. They have genuinely to insert themselves as members of the one Body of Christ in the local church. (Sometimes this is not easy to do because you have your own institutions.)
2. They have to help build up the local church as a communion of life and love.
3. They have to help build it up as the sign of unity and fellowship.
4. In the local church religious have to be engaged in the triple dialogue that the Church in Asia has long advocated: dialogue with other faiths, dialogue with cultures, dialogue

with the poor. Religious are often better formed and equipped to do this triple dialogue.

Such pastoral implications would require creative insertion of religious congregations into the life-realities of the local church, insertion into its pastoral vision and its pastoral thrust. Here there would truly be a dynamic and fruitful inter-play between religious charism and ministry in the local church.

Likewise necessary would be the collaboration of religious toward the envisioning of a common pastoral vision in the local church and the building of structures of communion. Such structures would include those of governance toward a more participatory church as well as structures of coordination. This is so in order that the diversity of gifts in the members of the Body of Christ that find their expression in diverse pastoral programs in the local church might come together due to a unified direction toward a common pastoral vision.

D. Witnesses and Prophets of the Spirituality of Communion

Above all, the role of religious in the formation of the people of God in the local Church toward communion of life and love/unity and fellowship is necessary.

Religious have long been recognized as "experts of communion". This well deserved reputation recognizes that building communion is a fundamental call to religious vis-a-vis their religious communities.

Religious are witnesses and prophets of communion. That is part of their identity. It is their life. To be authentic a religious community has to teach and form its members to be in communion with one another, to share with one another, to love and serve one another. *Vita Consecrata* states, "*Consecrated Persons* are asked to be true experts of communion and to practice its spirituality of communion as witnesses and artisans of that plan of communion which stands at the center of history according to God" (VC, 46).

Beyond their religious community, Religious are to be in communion with the rest of God's people. Their identity as consecrated in community impels them to teach and form others toward communion. This communion flows from the Trinitarian God, finds its most sublime expression in the Eucharist, and is reflected in the unity and fellowship that should characterize the people of God.

The most lasting contribution that Religious can provide involves "the task of *spreading the spirituality of communion*, first of all in their internal life and then in the Church community, and even beyond its boundaries, by beginning a dialogue in charity, especially in those places where today's world is torn apart by ethnic hatred or senseless violence" (VC, 51; quoted in "*Starting Afresh from Christ*", 29). This is the "particular task" that the "Church entrusts to communities of consecrated life" (*hoc. cit.*). Its prophetic value is evident in a world of social dissonance, violence, and discordance.

I shall not dwell on the pastoral implications of the triple dialogue on Religious in the local Church. In this symposium

there are forthcoming reflections on evangelization and inter-religious dialogue that would surely pick up the first two kinds of dialogues (with diverse cultures, with other faiths).

E. Dialogue with and Preferential Option for the Poor.

Here I shall emphasize the dialogue with the poor. By now, some forty years after Vatican II, we all realize that the Church is called to be authentically conformed to Christ. His preference for the poor demonstrates the nature of our loving God in Jesus as God-made-poor. Especially in an Asian world of immense poverty and intensifying marginalization, the disciple-Church has to be the true image of Christ-made-poor for the sake of the poor (see EA, 34).

In living the Lord's disconcerting paradigm of Gospel poverty, Religious have a privileged place (see *Starting Afresh from Christ*, 34; VC, 82). Evangelical poverty is their daily religious norm and commitment. They have to live it daily. This connotes a profoundly humble form of servanthood at the service of the needy and poor. It requires a clearly visible form of dispossession and austerity so that the "poor might become rich." Further, by the very nature of religious life, the commitment to and the living of evangelical poverty is not only individual. It is also communal.

And there's the rub. We need to look deeply into ourselves as Church or as Religious and ask in the depths of our hearts whether we are indeed evangelically poor. Surely we can give a new meaning of the vow of poverty as a commitment to share or a commitment to be available to those who are poor. But the evangelical poverty of Christ-made-poor

surely goes beyond these descriptions of sharing and availability. He lived as a poor man, he called the poor and announced the Gospel to the poor. He walked with them and called them to be his disciples. He identified himself with them. This identification and solidarity with the poor powerfully challenges the whole Church, especially Bishops who are Vicars of Christ. It likewise strongly challenges those who have vowed to follow the poor Christ as the radical norm of their daily life in order that they might be in deep and effective communion with the poor.

F. Missionary and Pastoral Implications.

Because evangelical poverty is a distinctive sign of Consecrated Persons and their communities, the following would be a few of the missionary and pastoral implications:

1. In the context of Asia's multitudes of poor people, Religious need to review their lives, religious structures, missionary and pastoral commitments in the local church and undertake the necessary steps for genuine renewal. Speaking to us through the faces of the poor, the Lord is calling us daily to continual conversion.

2. A missionary and pastoral commitment to a preferential option for the poor impels Religious to reach out to new faces of the poor in the local church and care for them. Such are the faces of oppressed women and children, broken families, marginalized indigenous peoples, AIDS victims, migrant workers and their families. New ministries have to reflect a vision of the local Church as the sign of the poor Christ's saving and healing presence. Truly deserving of our deep

gratitude are consecrated persons who "were able to leave the security of *the known* to thrust themselves into unknown places and works... Wherever they are, they have constituted a link between the Church and marginal groups and those not reached by ordinary pastoral ministry" (*Starting Afresh from Christ*, 36).

3. Today in various parts of Asia the local Church is envisioning a "new way of being Church" through the building of Basic Ecclesial Communities/Basic Human Communities (FABC TAC, Thesis 9, describes BEC's as "especially significant 'places' of inculturation and the building up of the local Church"). Religious congregations need to contribute their own time, talents and resources generously in community formation among the grassroots. Such sharing could be to train and empower lay leaders, to teach people how to listen to the Word of God through prayerful reading and reflection, to develop inculturated liturgy, and build fellowship and solidarity. These goals would certainly require the setting up of new ministries and the development of modules of formation for their own members.

G. Witnesses and Prophets of the Call to Holiness in the Local Church.

In the light of the consecration and communion that are at the heart of Religious Life and identity, the primary focus of the Third Millennium on holiness calls Religious to assist in the formation of God's people in the local Church toward holiness.

1. Religious are in a privileged position of leadership in exploring the inculturation of Christian spirituality as it draws from the religious and cultural heritage of the Local Church in Asia, e.g., Asian ways of approaching the Divine and ways of praying. Religious are to help instruct lay people in the ways of the Lord, in approaches to prayer that consider their active involvement in secular matters. They should help "lay people to relate the Word of God to the events of their daily lives" (TAC, Theses on the Local Church, "Pastoral Corollaries and Recommendations, VII)

2. They should take a leading role in evaluating and renewing popular devotions and practices of popular piety (see *ibid*, VI).

3. They are to invite lay collaborators to deeper communion with them and with the Lord by associating them more closely with the spiritual life of their congregations, in a creative manner that is in accord with their state of life.

It is most commendable that many religious men and women are assisting members of the diocesan clergy toward a deeper appreciation and love of their own ministry in the local Church. Religious are also helping to develop an authentic spirituality that emerges from pastoral experience and in turn responds to the many challenges of active ministry.

Conclusion

This presentation has reflected on three dimensions in the life of the local church: (1) the announcing of the Gospel by way of inculturation; (2) preferential option for the poor;

and (3) the call to be holy. It has presented a number of missionary and pastoral implications for Religious.

The three dimensions are not three separate tasks. Rather they are fundamental features of the birth, growth, and mission of the local Church. They are essential characteristics that should suffuse the life of every member of the local church. They should be part and parcel of every apostolate and every ministry. Finally, every Religious should see these dimensions from the perspective of witness and prophecy.

I pray that this reflection may help you to understand more deeply the important and indispensable role that you play in the local church. May we always be in profound communion with the chaste, poor, and obedient Christ. May his Mother, herself poor, chaste and obedient be our daily companion and guide so that our efforts in building up the local Church may with God's grace bear abundant fruit - fruit that lasts.

The Diocesan Shrine of San Antonio de Padua of Pila, Laguna: Historical Origins and Development (1578-2002)

LUCIANO P.R. SANTIAGO

The Church of San Antonio de Padua of Pila, Laguna was the first church to be dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua in the Philippines (1578) and most probably, in Asia as well. The parish of Pila became *the first Antonine parish* in the country when it was established in 1581, the 350th anniversary of the glorious death of the saint. The town itself was officially called "San Antonio de Padua de Pila," or simply, "San Antonio de Pila." The parish seal depicts the saint holding a lily, the symbol of purity, in his right hand and carrying the Child Jesus on his left arm. Known as "the miracle worker" even during his lifetime, St. Anthony is the most venerated Franciscan saint next to the founder of the order himself, St. Francis of Assisi. Thus, the choice of St. Anthony as the patron saint of Pila reflected the pivotal role given by the Franciscans to the parish and town.¹

¹ Santiago. "The Roots of Pila." pp. 125-155.

Even before the coming of the Spaniards, Pila was already noted for its spiritual ambience. The center of the town was known as Pagalangan, which means "The Place of Reverence." The original site of the town, Pinagbayanan was hallowed by the venerable graves of the dead laid out with exquisite Chinese porcelain and local jars of handsome design as *pabdon* (provisions) for the afterlife.² St. Anthony (1195-1231) lived in Europe during the Golden Age of Pila at Pinagbayanan when, as indicated by archaeological studies, it was one of the most important centers of trade, as well as of religion and culture during the early part of the second millennium. Little did the "saint of lost causes and finder of lost things" know that more than three centuries later, Padua would form a spiritual link with Pila on the other side of the globe via Spain and Mexico.

The Order of St. Francis (OSF), also known as the Order of Friars Minor (OFM), arrived in Manila in 1578. Next to the Augustinians, they were the second religious order to reach the Philippines. Being a mendicant order, they were the only religious congregation, which renounced ownership of haciendas. At once, they built their main church in honor of Our Lady of the Angels in the walled city. The cult of St. Anthony of Padua was introduced in this church, which became popular as the Tuesday Devotion in Old Manila. A statue of the saint was erected in front of the church in the 19th century.³

- Ibid.; Tenazas. *Report*, pp. 12, 15-20.

³ Joaquin. "The Minor Ones;" Perez, *Origen de las Misiones Franciscanas*.

To the southern region, the congregation lost no time in sending the intrepid pair, Fray Juan Portocarrero de Plasencia and Fray Diego de Oropesa de San Jose who soon earned the title, "The Apostles of Laguna and Tayabas." Moved by the faith of the Pilenos, Oropesa decided to establish among them his "principal residence" also dedicated to St. Anthony while Plasencia chose Lumbang as his home base in honor of St. Francis. (Its patron was later changed to St. Sebastian.) From these two missionary centers, they radiated out to evangelize the other towns of Laguna and Tayabas (now Quezon).⁴

From a *reduccion* - where the new converts were gathered for instruction in the Faith - Pila was elevated to a parish almost certainly on the feast of its titular, St. Anthony of Padua on June 13, 1581. Oropesa became its first pastor (1581-83). Next to Pila, the second Antonine parish to be organized by the Franciscans was that of Iriga, now a city in Camarines Sur (1683) followed by Siruma, in the same province (1687). The parish of Masbate, though established by the Franciscans in the 1580s, adopted St. Anthony as its patron only in the 1880s. Laguna, Tayabas Province and the Bicol Region were the spiritual territories of the Franciscans till the end of the Spanish Regime.⁵

⁴ AFAFV. Libro de la Provincia. Tomo I, folio 18; Galende. "Augustinians." 35-79; Huerta. Estado Geografico. pp. 137-139; Gomez Platero. Catalogo Biografico. pp. 17 & 25; Plasencia. Customs; AFIO. La Llave. "Cronica" in Tormo Sanz. Lucban. pp. 25 & 125. De la Llave (ca. 1570-1645) wrote the first Franciscan chronicle in the Philippines. He was the pastor of Pila (1635-37).

⁵ CBCP. Catholic Directory, pp. 110, 111 & 112.

Impressed by the nobility of the townspeople and their extensive territory and influence, the conquistadors conferred on the town the special title, "*La Noble Villa de Pila*" in 1610. It took eighteen years to build the first stone church from 1599 to 1617. The encomienda of Pila was so big that it had to be shared by two conquistadors, Andrade and Pehalosa and they built not one but two convents for the Franciscans indicating the large sums they had collected from the residents. The sacred edifice of Pila was described as "the most beautiful church in the province of Laguna" by the Alcalde Mayor (Governor) Don Jose Pelaez, father of Padre Pedro Pablo Pelaez, the leader of the secularization movement in the 19th century.⁶

From the beginning to the present, the cult of St. Anthony has flourished in Pila in an unbroken chain of promise (*pangako*) and practice of the faithful. It consists of the Tuesday Devotion and an association, which has become part of the worldwide Pious Union of St. Anthony. The parish also became famous for its mellifluous choirs and elegant processions in homage to the saint from the 17th to the 19th centuries. To signify their gratitude for the favors and miracles granted to them, the devotees wear a simple dark brown dress with white cincture during mass. Healed of serious illnesses, small boys are also dressed in the holy habit. An annual novena for his intercession is held prior to his feast day, June 13, which is celebrated as the town fiesta and highlighted with a grand procession. Groups of Pilenos in other towns or cities who

⁶ Santiago. "The Roots of Pila;" "Pomp, Pageantry & Gold;" Huerta. *Estado Geografico*, p. 138.

could not come home for the occasion also pray the novena together wherever they are.

In the noble villa, the Franciscans established the second printing press in the Philippines in 1611. The first Tagalog dictionary was printed here in 1613 by Tomas Pinpfn and Domingo Loag. (It is twenty-five years older than the first book published in the United States.) The local pastor Fray Pedro de San Buenaventura compiled the *vocabulario* to facilitate the evangelization of the Tagalog region. In another decade, another authoritative dictionary of the language was accomplished also in Pila by Fray Francisco de San Antonio, OFM. In 1618, the Franciscan infirmary was transferred from Lumbang to Pila where the sick and retired missionaries were taken care of and breathed their last, comforted by the spirit of St. Anthony. Manila Archbishop Fernando Montero de Espinosa, newly arrived from Madrid, also died here unexpectedly in 1644 on his way to take possession of his see. After 55 years in Pila, the infirmary moved to Sta. Cruz, Laguna in 1673.⁷

The oldest surviving church bell of Pila was cast on the centenary of the parish in 1681 with the Franciscan emblem and the inscription "San Antonio de Pila." The faithful hid it from the rampaging British invaders in 1762 by submerging it in Laguna de Bay facing the church. It is now the third oldest church bell in the Philippines. With the erection of a new stone belfry in 1890, the parish recast

⁷ San Buenaventura. *Vocabulario*; San Antonio. *Vocabulario*. p. 208; Santiago. "The Roots of Pila;" Jose, Jr. *Impreso: Phil. Imprints* p. 28; *Impreso: Exhibition Notes*.

another undated old bell in honor of St. Anthony in 1893. *It is the only church tower in the Philippines, which bears two bells inscribed with St. Anthony's name.* (The second oldest church bell dedicated to the saint pertains to Paete dated 1847, followed by Sta. Maria, Bulacan, 1877 and then Majayjay, 1929.)⁸

Because of several social crises in the 18th century, San Roque was invoked as the second patron saint of Pila. Due to persistent severe flooding in Pagalangan in the late 18th century, the town center was transferred to its present site in Sta. Clara, which was the hacienda of the three Brothers Rivera, Don Felizardo, Don Miguel and Don Rafael. Part of the estate is the adjacent Barangay San Antonio, among others. Marred by controversy, the relocation took almost two decades to complete under the leadership of Don Felizardo de Rivera y Evangelista (1755-1810), the eldest of the brothers, who also drew up the grid plans for the new site. Thus, he is considered the founder of Nueva Pila. He pledged the spiritual and material support of the Riveras to the church of St. Anthony *in perpetuum* up to the last of their line. Stone by stone, the old church in Pagalangan was the last edifice to be transplanted to Sta. Clara under the inspiration of St. Anthony. For the main duration of the move, the townspeople were exempted from payment of tributes, forced labor and personal services.⁹

For almost a quarter of a century, from 1812 to 1835, Filipino secular priests served for the first time as the acting

⁸ Jose, Jr. "Phil. Church Bells."

⁹ Santiago. "When a town has to move."

pastors of Pila due to a shortage of Franciscan priests. They put the finishing touches to the stone church of Nueva Pila. The pastor who served the parish for the longest time during the Spanish era was Fray Benito del Quintanar, OFM (1839-1852). He supervised the construction of the present convent for nine years until it was completed in 1849. In behalf of the Pilenos, he had the following prayer-poem in Latin inscribed in a rectangular stone tablet over the main gate of the convent:

"Fave, Protege, Custod., / Bened. Que S.e Antoni: /Domui Istam Novam / Quam Tibi Dedicavi. " ("St. Anthony, look with favor on, protect, guard and bless this new house which is dedicated to you.") The saint has answered Pila's fervent prayer. The stone church and convent have survived to the present.¹⁰

Fray Benito also started the *Archicofradia del Nuestro Senor Padre San Francisco*, which was next in rank to the *Venerable Orden Tercera* (VOT) of the Franciscan Order. The archconfraternity was empowered to affiliate lay groups of the same character from the other parishes. The religious festival of Flores de Mayo, for which Pila is now well known, was introduced in 1888 and brought to the fore the deep Marian devotion in the parish.¹¹

The placid life of the town and parish was rent asunder from 1896, when the Revolution against Spain broke out, until 1902 when the American colonizers, took over and

"Santiago. "The Roots of Pila."

¹¹ Ibid.

reorganized the municipal government. Before this, the American soldiers had occupied the belfry and convent for more than a year destroying and looting the furniture and other properties of the church.¹²

Since the beginning of the 20th century, Filipino pastors have been serving the faithful of Pila. The parish was transferred from the Archdiocese of Manila to the Diocese of Lipa when the latter was erected in 1910 and finally, to the newly established Diocese of San Pablo in 1966. The first Pilefio nun, Sor Consuelo, OSB (the former Miss Milagros Relova y Rivera) professed her vows as a Benedictine nun in 1932. The first Pilefio priest, Fr. Felix Codera was ordained in 1938. Although he was born in Marinduque, His Eminence, Ricardo Cardinal Vidal, Archbishop of Cebu, and his family of origin hail from Pila. They are all ardent devotees of St. Anthony.¹³

During World War II, Pila became the center of guerilla activities in Laguna and Fr. Codera, together with Frs. Atienza and Baez, volunteered as chaplains of the underground. Ironically, there was a rice boom in the town during the war and thus, it became the rice granary of Laguna which the faithful unselfishly shared with those in want from the surrounding towns and as far as Manila and its suburbs. Naturally, the abundance at the time of war was attributed by the Pilenos to St. Anthony, "the miracle worker." As expected, Pila was the first town in the province to be

- Ibid.; Arzobispado de Manila. *Catdlogo de las Reclamaciones*. pp. 68-69.

-¹ Santiago. "Roots of Pila."

liberated by the guerillas in January 1945 sparing it from any major destruction.¹⁴

Pope Pius XII declared St. Anthony a Doctor of the Universal Church with the title *Doctor Evangelicus* on January 16, 1946. The following year, a group of grateful parishioners led by the pastor, Fr. Francisco Radovan and Dona Maria Ordoveza vda. de Rivera, founded a college in his honor, St. Anthony Academy, now known as the Liceo de Pila.¹⁵

With the destruction of the Franciscan church in Intramuros at the close of the Second World War, the site of the cult of St. Anthony was moved in 1947 to the *Venerable Orden Tercera* (VOT) Friary in Sampaloc, Manila, which is now the Shrine of the saint in the archdiocese. (The monumental statue of St. Anthony in Intramuros was, however, transferred to the grounds of the Santuario de San Antonio in Forbes Park in Makati. The Sampaloc friary had been dedicated together with the adjacent Church of Our Lady of Loreto in 1616, thirty five years after the inauguration of the parish of San Antonio de Padua de Pila.) The Manila shrine has submitted a petition to the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines to declare it the National Shrine of St. Anthony of Padua.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.; Diocese of Lipa. *Golden Jubilee*; St. Anthony Junior College. *Silver Jubilee*.

¹⁶ CBCP. *Catholic Directory*, p. 685; Telephone interview with the parish secretary based on a pamphlet about the archdiocesan shrine, which she read on the phone. May 2002.

For the Jubilee Year 2000, the historic Church of San Antonio de Padua of Pila was selected as a Pilgrim Church of the Diocese of San Pablo. The parish is the center of the Vicariate of San Antonio de Padua, which includes the parishes of the Immaculate Conception (Sta. Cruz), St. Joseph (Linga, Pila) and The Risen Lord (Victoria).¹⁷

Revolving around the Church of St. Anthony of Padua, the town center of Pila, comprising 35 old houses and buildings, was proclaimed a National Historical Landmark by the National Historical Institute on May 17, 2000.¹⁸

The proposal to erect the St. Anthony Shrine of Pila was first made by the former parish priest, the late Msgr. Renato Cosico, HP who died in 2001. His successor, Rev. Fr. Melchor Barcenas worked earnestly for its approval. The position paper (slightly revised as the present article) was written by this author on May 30, 2002. It was approved by the Most Reverend Francisco San Diego, DD, Bishop of San Pablo on June 30, 2002 who kindly notified the author in the following letter:

Dear Dr. Santiago,

Greetings in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ!

I am very pleased to have come to know the devotion of many Christian faithful to the saints in our diocese, and in your case, to St. Anthony of Padua.

¹⁷Lijauco. *Diocese of San Pablo*, pp. 52-53 & 82-84.

¹⁸ Pila Historical Society Foundation. "Foreword." *Treasures of Pila*. p. 1.

I have read your position paper regarding the proposed Santuario dedicated to San Antonio de Padua and have studied the matter in the presence of God.

Thus, I have granted permission with regard to the declaration of the Diocesan Shrine in honor of St. Anthony of Padua in Pila, Laguna.

By the present letter, I wish to extend my sincerest appreciation for the historical and pastoral relevance of your well-researched paper. Dr. Santiago, may you continue to use your talents for the glory of God and the service of the Church and of mankind.

God's blessings to you through the help of St. Anthony of Padua is implored by

Your Servant of God,

fFrancisco C. San Diego, DD (sgd.)
Bishop of San Pablo
Shrine Inauguration

The church was formally elevated as the Diocesan Shrine of St. Anthony of Padua and solemnly inaugurated on July 9, 2002 by Bishop Francisco San Diego, in the presence of His Eminence Ricardo Cardinal Vidal, the clergy, nunnery and the faithful of the town. It is the first and so far, the only diocesan shrine in Laguna. The wrought iron marker was donated jointly by Ms. Cora Relova and Dr. Luciano PR. Santiago of the Pila Historical Society Foundation, Inc.¹⁹

¹⁹ The Shrine of San Antonio de Padua, Pila, Laguna. (Historical Marker). July 9, 2002.

As *Bayang Pinagpala* (Blessed Town), Pilenos ascribe their unique blessings through the centuries to the intercession of their triumvirate of patron saints, San Antonio de Padua, San Roque and the Virgen de las Flores.

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April-May Sunday Homilies

WHAT IS NEW WITH THE COVENANT?

Garth Wehrfritz-Hanson

5th Sunday of Lent

Our first reading this Sunday is one of the most beautiful passages in the Old Testament. Jeremiah, for the most part, an angry and weeping prophet, speaks in this passage a message of hope and great expectation. When the Jewish people were facing their deepest despair and destruction; when their enemies are about to overpower them and cart them off into exile; Jeremiah gives his people a vision from God which is full of hope and promise. A vision of a new covenant.

Down through the centuries, we Christians have all too often interpreted this passage as if it were originally speaking to us. This is clearly *Not* the case.

It is only centuries later that we are listening to this passage of Jeremiah, which originally was spoken to the

Jewish people. This means that the new covenant was and still is promised first to the Jews, then later to us Gentiles. We have to approach this passage of Jeremiah, first of all, *with humility*. We are the inheritors of this passage through the Jews and through our Messiah, who is also a Jew. As we interpret this passage then, we would do well to follow the wisdom of the apostle Paul in Romans 11:18: "It is not you (i.e., the Gentiles) that support the root (i.e., Israel), but the root that supports you."

When we read and study this passage, one of the first questions that arises is: "What is new about this new covenant?" It is not new in that God is the One who establishes, who takes the initiative to establish the covenant. This was also true of the old covenant. Nor is it new in terms of its basis: the law, the Torah, which guides people in the covenant and still remains the foundation. Nor, again, is the goal of the new covenant different from the old. The goal was stated before, and it is this: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

1. The first thing that we note concerning what is new about this covenant is how God gives it to Israel. "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts." This is different from the older covenant in that it was written on tablets of stone. Why this difference between a covenant written on stone and a covenant written within the heart?

Well, first of all, God realized that the older form of the covenant was broken by the Israelites. They had not and could not keep it completely because of their sin. So, a major surgery was required on their hearts to remove all of the blockages; to become perfectly healthy. The Jewish people

believed that the heart was the seat of our conscience, will and emotions. In the older covenant, there were many instances of external instruction failing to produce perfect obedience on the part of humans. God would reshape, remake the heart, so that within everyone there would be the capacity to keep and obey the law.

As Christians, we believe that God sent Jesus as the One with the law written within his heart. He provides us with the perfect example of living in total love and obedience to God. His Last Supper is for us a new covenant in his blood - which, was sealed through his death and resurrection.

However, like the Jewish people, the new covenant is not complete for us yet. We, like the Jews, still look forward to the coming of the days when both of us shall completely be God's people, completely obey the law, completely love God. We, like the Jewish people, look forward to the days when the new covenant shall come in all of its fullness; when our hearts shall be so full of the law within our conscience, will and emotions, that we shall be in a perfect relationship with God and one another.

2. The second thing new about this new covenant is this: "No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord." In other words, the newness of the covenant shall put an end to all teachers, preachers, prophets and priests. There shall be no need to teach anyone.

That's a rather scary thing for us priests, to, quite literally, abolish the need for preaching and teaching. How

is this possible? Well, according to Jeremiah, it's possible because the new covenant is a great equalizer among all people. The least, the greatest, and everyone in-between, shall all be equal in that the law shall be perfectly written within each person.

Think of that! No more academic snobbery or elitism; no more scorn towards those who in this life lacked academic achievement; no more dividing people up into categories, classes, genders and so on. The brilliant Ph.D. scholar shall no longer be more learned than the grade-school drop out ditch digger. Peasants and Prime Ministers, the youngest child, the oldest adult shall all be equals. Everyone shall equally know God.

The word "know" here and elsewhere in the Bible often refers to the closest, most intimate sort of relationship. Here it refers to a relationship with God involving perfect, complete love. A relationship of knowing whereby we trust in God without any doubt or suspicion or reservation.

For both Christians and Jews, this perfect knowing is not possible right now in our sinful condition; even though we are given brief foretastes of it here and there, as we live out our faith journey. However, this perfect knowing God is our greatest hope for the future - when, at the consummation of all history, the kingdom of God shall come in all of its fullness. In the meantime, this wonderful promise of equality for everyone in knowing God is a tremendous comfort to those who, right now, suffer from all of this world's injustice and inequality. This promise keeps us on our faith journey towards justice and equality.

3. This leads us to the third thing new about this new covenant, namely: "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." The forgiveness of sin, is a constant reminder, a constant promise of who our God really is; of what kind of God we believe in. The forgiveness of sin affirms, over and again, that our God is a God of grace and love.

For both Jews and Christians who believe in this new covenant, the forgiveness of sins means that we can live each day with a clean slate, a new beginning. But it also refers to the future, when, at the Last Judgment, God shall declare us *Not Guilty*. We need not fear or dread this event, for we can indeed trust in God's promise of forgiveness.

Biblical scholar, Hans Walter Wolff puts it this way: "*To forgive* means to pardon completely; it is a complete cancellation of all our contempt of God and his will, and the restoration of friendship. *To remember their sins no more* is a legal term which really means no longer bringing the evil thing before any court of law; it means dropping the case once and for all. That is what the forgiveness of sins really means: to be saved from our most dangerous enemies in the face of judgment, to be given a free pardon for our worst offenses."

During this Lenten Season, as we journey with Jesus ever more closer to the cross, may we, in humility and awe give God our heartfelt thanks for bringing us into the new covenant. In good times and in bad, may we cling faithfully to God's promises in this new covenant. May this new covenant empower each one of us to be God's loving servants.

PARODY OR REALITY?

Richard Finn, O.P.

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

The desire to be met with acclaim - to be hailed as liberators - seemingly runs deep. Across the centuries those who wield power also want the glory. Roman governors and emperors long ago entered into the cities of the empire with great pomp and majesty.

What then should we make of Jesus and his small band of disciples as they make their entry this Sunday into Jerusalem?

Jesus riding a colt and the crowds laying down their cloaks and palm branches, seem almost like a parody of the 'real thing'. The dignitaries have failed to show up. A colt appears like an embarrassment when compared to a horse. The disciples' poor cloaks are a world away from the gold and purple of imperial vestments.

Yet there's no mistaking the resemblances. This is the only time we see Jesus not traveling on foot. He demands that he rides a colt as a king with authority over his subjects' goods. And the colt recalls Zechariah's vision of the Messiah who enters Jerusalem: "riding on an ass, on a colt, the foal of an ass. (Zechariah 9:9)

All this belongs to a royal entry, but how seriously can we take it? If this *is* the opening event in a popular uprising, if Jesus is asking to be seen as the Messiah who comes to liberate his city through conquest, no wonder it fails so soon.

Yet we have only to read one more verse of Mark to see that it is no uprising at all. Jesus enters the city, looks over the temple, and heads back to Bethany. The royal entry loses its apparent majesty and becomes what it is meant to be: a procession towards the passion.

There is both a contrast and a continuity between Jesus carried into Jerusalem and Jesus carrying his cross on the *Via Dolorosa*. He will reign from the cross, where his triumph over evil, sin, and death will eventually be seen for what it is in the dawn of the resurrection. It is not for nothing that the Church stretches our patience by reading two Gospels on Palm Sunday - the triumphal entry *and* the Passion. So we prepare ourselves to see the true glory of the suffering servant. That's the victory Christ heads towards.

Even so, we should not forget the majesty of this 'triumphal entry'. It may not be wise to simply dwell on the collapse of our hoped-for triumph. Perhaps we are meant to be let down. For if Jesus will ultimately exceed our expectations of the Messiah, he does not do so by fulfilling expectations of a military Messiah. He is not king of any Israeli state.

Mark seeks to expose what is fickle in our hero-worship, our misplaced hope for an easy victory. It is too easy to hide from ourselves both the sufferings engineered by power politics and the sufferings of Christian discipleship. We gloss over evils we are ready to inflict; we flinch from evils we are unwilling to endure.

These two faults conspire: they tempt us to look for salvation in the wrong place, even to set ourselves up as

some kind of secular saviour. Those who fail to 'recognize' us as such are then exposed to anger and aggression. How dare they accuse us of violence, convict us of double standards!

The proclamation of the Gospel is not the simple, once-and-for-all, delivery of a message. It is a repeated cleansing of our fantasies about Jesus, a continual training in the way of the cross. What we hear has to be made our own, so that we are freed from the belief in a military Messiah.

In this we are not so different from the first-century Jews and Christians who thought that the Messiah should come with angelic armies to take Israel by storm. We may think we know better, but do we? In these days of war there's a virtue in being taught, yet again, that earthly power and heavenly glory do not advance in triumph together.

Fr. Richard Finn is the Regent of Studies of the English Dominicans, and sub-prior of the Priory of the Holy Spirit, Oxford.

ALLOWING OURSELVES TO BE FOUND BY GOD

Allan White, O.P.

Easter Sunday (B)

If you mention the word theology to many people they are liable to turn up their noses and imagine scholarly studies, containing shelf upon shelf of dusty and thick volumes, pored over by wrinkled scholars who habitually dwell in the higher realms of abstraction. But it is actually possible to study theology through art.

The artistic traditions of the eastern and western Churches portray the resurrection differently. We westerners are very concerned with history and with events. We like to try and freeze the resurrection into an event.

The fact that there is no description in scripture of the *process* of the resurrection, far from inhibiting western artists, has actually given their imaginations free rein. You will all be familiar with the spectacular depictions of Christ emerging from the tomb in various states of undress, radiating power and majesty brandishing the standard of the resurrection, a red cross on a white ground, before him.

The eastern tradition does not show the event so much as its effect. The finest icons show a majestic Christ, springing down amongst the ranks of the faithful dead, drawing them up in a glorious chain dance of joy. Christ lays hold of them all, and in the Spirit, draws them into the communion he enjoys with the Father, a communion that even death cannot sunder.

Jesus' mission was physical. He reached out and touched especially those excluded from the communion of society; those who followed him had also, in some way, been touched by him. He had laid his hands on them, drawn them away from their nets, from their tax offices, from their hearths and homes.

His touch had caused them to leave everything and follow him. Their despairing conviction when faced with his death was that they would never again know his touch. The withdrawal of Jesus from their lives may involve their losing touch with each other.

When the women went to the tomb with spices, it was to embalm the body. They did not want it to wither away. They wanted to preserve it, to hold on to it, to stay in touch with it. But the precious body of the Lord was not there.

They meet the risen Christ when they have turned away from the tomb, and left everything behind them. Jesus discloses himself to them by greeting them or calling them by name. The spontaneous reaction that this evokes is the desire to hang on; the women fall at his feet and cling to him.

It is almost as if they wish to ensure that he stays there firmly planted in their midst. He will only stay there if they hang on to him.

The message of the resurrection is that Christ still lays hold of us. The way we can stay in touch with him is by allowing ourselves to be touched by him and in bringing his touch to others.

The only person who declines to touch him is in fact Thomas. Thomas was the one who clung to the literal reality of the death of Jesus. Others might have preferred to forget the reality of Jesus' death, but Thomas could not: for him the wounds were real.

When confronted with the risen Christ, he declines the invitation to place his hands in the marks of his sufferings. There is no need. Thomas confesses that Jesus has laid hold on him; he has been touched by the risen Christ.

The lesson that the earliest generations of Christians learned is necessary for us too. We need to allow ourselves to be touched by Christ, to be drawn into communion with him.

The Welsh poet R. S. Thomas has a line in one of his poems:

*He is such a fast
God, always before us and
Leaving us as we arrive.*

We often imagine ourselves pursuing an elusive God, trying to find him as the treasure in the field. The message of the resurrection is that he finds us. The seekers at the tomb could not find him until he had found them. Redemption is allowing oneself to be found by God.

Fr. Allan White is Prior Provincial of the English Province of the Order of Preachers.

THE PEACE OF RECONCILIATION

Austin Milner, O.P.

Second Sunday of Easter

On the first Easter Sunday the disciples were gathered together, the doors were locked, but suddenly they became aware that Jesus was standing among them. The same thing happened the following Sunday and it continues to happen whenever the Church comes together in Jesus' name, especially on Sunday, the first day of the week, for this is now the Lord's day.

So even on this Easter Sunday, Jesus is among his followers wherever in the world they have come together. This real presence is experienced when he speaks to them through the scriptures which are read, when he gives himself to them as food and drink, which unites them to him in one body, when he joins himself to that body as it sings and praises God his Father, and when he offers to the Father the whole body of his members along with himself.

But the principal effect of this presence is the experience of the peace that he imparts to his followers.

On the very first Easter Sunday, the disciples were hiding in an upper room, Jesus was dead, crucified, and all their hopes were in ruins. They had abandoned him and even denied that they knew him. They were filled with guilt. For fear of what the Jews might do to them they had locked the doors.

But then Jesus was standing among them very much alive. The joy they experienced at that moment must have been mixed with the fear of his rebuke, but all he says to them is: *Peace be with you.*

As the outcasts of Jewish society, the tax-gatherers and the sinners, when invited to eat with Jesus during his ministry, were made to feel forgiven as though invited to God's heavenly banquet, so the guilt-ridden disciples knew, on this first Easter day, that they were restored to favor and bidden to enter into the joy of their Lord.

Peace puts an end to fear, peace puts an end to anger about the present and anxiety about the future, peace reassures us of God's love and friendship. It is through this peace of our risen Lord Jesus, through the assurance of his reconciling love, that his presence among us each Sunday is first of all revealed.

On that first Easter Sunday, without further word or warning he sent his disciples forth to be witnesses of his peace and his life giving love. *As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.*

So each Sunday his followers are sent on a mission of peace and joy. To enable his disciples to carry out that mission he breathes on them and imparts to them the Holy Spirit. For the Holy Spirit gives power for mission.

But the particular power mentioned here is the power to forgive sins. It is without any doubt the meaning of this text that Jesus gives to all his disciples the power to take part in the process of the forgiveness of sins, and so to continue his mission of peace.

How is this power to be exercised? In the first place it is exercised in all those things which leads to conversion, the nurturing of faith and to baptism.

It is also exercised in the whole work of calling back those who after baptism fall again into grievous sin, enabling them once again to experience the peace of Christ. The fact that the shepherds of the community necessarily have a very important role in this process of the reconciliation of sinners in no way belittles the role of the community and each of its members.

The Christian community is the home of Christ's peace. The goal of every Christian community is to make all the members feel accepted and wanted as people whom God has forgiven, and whose sins are no longer remembered and held against them. To let them feel recognized as his sons and daughters, people whom he has filled with his Holy Spirit.

In the Church's mission to forgive sins, this quality of peace, joy and mutual acceptance, which should pervade every local community of the Church, plays an important role. So may the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Fr. Austin Milner is superior of the Dominican community at St. Theresa's Church, Kingston, Jamaica.

SO GREAT WAS THEIR JOY

Robert Eccles, O.P.

Third Sunday of Easter

When we became believers - we could say also for some of us, when we were invited to follow in the footsteps of St. Dominic - it was not in order to follow a rule of life, however holy. It was to taste this joy. It was to be set free from the darkness that overshadows human living, set free to share a joy, a joy that no one can take from us.

If we are believers but cannot imagine this Paschal joy, we have something to learn. If we are followers of Blessed Dominic but not in joy, we have somehow got it wrong. We cannot know the companionship of the Risen Lord if our lives don't reflect this joy.

A person who is unhappy, on the surface or secretly, can't tell anyone about the resurrection. *The disciples were full of joy when they saw the Lord.*

This is a hard saying, because today the world is more than ever full of tears. It would be a cruel joy that was won by ignoring the pain of those in war-torn countries and the misery street children. We would be like infants shielded from the troubles of the world. In the end we would not be real, even to ourselves.

The true, fierce joy of Christians in the resurrection is a joy that looks steadfastly on the wounds he has to show us and does not turn away its gaze. For if there is no joy, what

have we to say to our brothers and sisters in their sufferings? How can we dare to go to them in their pain? Yet we must go to them, stand with them, in the name of the wounded Christ who is risen.

The only thing that prevents us living in joy is selfishness, egoism. Of course I'm not saying this to you, I'm saying it to myself!

Perhaps not one of you is actually a selfish individual. Yet it's very easy to be collectively selfish. A whole community can be too full of its own ego. We can unconsciously encourage one another, we can come to live in a selfish way without realizing it. And a household or a family that is living too well is really living at the expense of others.

So we have to make this constant, costly attempt to live in the real. The one who lives by the truth comes out into the light.

An apostolic life, the life to which we were all called by our baptism and confirmation, is a life of truthfulness. Of transparency. Where we are not afraid to look together at what we do, what we give and what we take, what we earn and what we spend, how we use our resources.

The grace and truth of the Incarnate Word, says Timothy Radcliffe, asks of us that we truthfully seek to know what are our resources for the common mission. This requires of us great mutual trust. But we are called to the utter gracious generosity of the Word.

This gospel passage ends on an urgent note. There is to be a leave-taking, a sending, the witnesses of 'these things' are going out to confront the world with this word of joy. Theirs is the constant attempt to face the realities, to see the wounds, the pain.

We are perhaps all too conscious of our own wounds, the failures to live our vocation fully, the disloyalties. But living in the real, accepting to look upon the wounds, we become companions of the risen Lord and share his joy.

So great was their joy that they could not believe it.

Fr. Bob Eccles works as a prison chaplain in Belgium as a member of an international community of Dominican friars based in Brussels at the heart of the European Union.

THE GOOD SHEPHERD: WARRIOR OF GOD

Fr. Joseph K. Horn

St. Barbara's Parish

Santa Ana, California

4th Sunday of Easter

What do you think of when you hear Jesus saying "I am the good shepherd"? If you're like most people, you visualize Jesus the way he's shown in paintings, surrounded by a flock of adoring sheep, with one small lamb on his shoulders, and he's smiling that easy smile that painters always give him, as if he's saying, "He's ain't heavy; he's my brother." We think of him as talking to the sheep, maybe singing to them, maybe giving them bits from his lunch, petting them, and being oh so gentle and sweet.

That mental picture is so sweet it makes me sick. This is not what Jesus meant when he said "I am the good shepherd." Not even close.

When Jesus said that he is the good shepherd, he did not mean that he's like those sweet paintings, and I can prove it.

Remember, this is the same Jesus who went into the temple and saw all those merchants ripping off people by exchanging money at unscrupulous rates, and Jesus flew into a rage and made a whip and thrashed them, shouting at them and flogging them unmercifully until they howled and took off running.

Now, wait a second. Is Jesus that kind, gentle, good shepherd of our imagination, or an angry young man who violently attacked people in church? Which is it: Jesus is the gentle Good Shepherd, or Jesus is the aggressive Warrior of God?

Look. If there are good shepherds, then there must be bad shepherds. When Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd," he knew that the Pharisees and synagogue officials were listening, and he was contrasting himself with them. It was his very clever way of saying, "You are bad shepherds. I will lay down my life for my sheep, but you are just hired hands who run away at the first sign of a wolf or a thief. You are bad shepherds." How would that have made his listeners feel? I doubt that they got the same mental image of a Good Shepherd as we do.

And let's get real. Our mental image is pointless. You can't tell whether somebody is a good shepherd by watching how he treats the sheep. It takes no brains or virtue to be nice to sheep. The test of a good shepherd isn't how he treats the sheep, but what he does to the *thief* or the *wolf* when they attack. How he treats *them* is what matters.

I dare you to imagine in your mind's eye the following painting. In the background are flocks of sheep grazing at peace on rolling green hills. But in the foreground we see a shepherd and a wolf grappling in bloody, mortal combat. The wolf's jowls are dripping with blood as it ferociously lunges at the shepherd's throat. The shepherd's clothes are torn and bloody, and he is in obvious pain but his face holds

a look that is a mixture of anger and courageous determination. He is looking directly into the face of the wolf, and he reaches towards it, ready to throw it to the ground. His hands are torn and bleeding, and it is easy to see that the fight has been going on for some time. But he is not giving up, and will not allow the wolf to get to the sheep. In the foreground of this painting are a shepherd's staff and an open shepherd's bag. The bag contains some bread and fish and a flask of wine: the shepherd's lunch, which he will eat later. But not now. He is busy fighting for his sheep, for that's what it means to be a good shepherd.

Or, if you prefer, imagine that it's not a wolf in the painting, but a thief attacking. The shepherd has pounced on the thief and is holding his shepherd's staff across the thief's throat, pinning him to the ground and slowly choking off his air, but the gasping thief is reaching up to grab the shepherd. It's a horrifying, violent sight, and yet, the whole time, there in the background, blissfully oblivious to the whole thing, the sheep continue to safely graze.

I hope the point of the painting is clear: the sheep may safely graze not in spite of the struggle but *because* of the struggle. The shepherd is fighting to keep them safe.

Why doesn't anybody paint The Good Shepherd like this? I'll tell you why. It's because it would make us uncomfortable. But religion is not supposed to be comfortable! When Jesus said that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep, he meant it! Literally! He *did* lay down his life for us, his flock... and tell me, did it make him *comfortable*?

If you remember just one thing from this homily today, make it this: the painting of The Good Shepherd. Remember that brutal conflict between the vicious wolf or thief and the brave shepherd, while the sheep graze safely. You see, my dear friends, a painting of a sweet and gentle shepherd might make us feel all warm and comfortable, but we were not saved by Jesus' sweetness and gentleness. We were saved by a man torn and bleeding and very uncomfortable. We were saved by a strong man, a courageous man, a man who proved when he laid down his life for us that he is The Good Shepherd.

I AM THE VINE, YOU ARE THE BRANCHES

Martin R. Ganeri, O.R

Fifth Sunday of Easter (B)

Images taken from the world with which we are familiar can have a powerful influence in shaping our understanding of how we relate to God and how this should affect our actions. They are especially powerful when we do not need to have explained what they involve or what effect they should have. Such images work immediately to form what we think, feel and do.

Some years ago I came to study the work of a certain Hindu theologian whose central image for the relationship between God and the world is that of embodiment, the relationship between a soul and its body. As the body of God the world is supported in existence by God, controlled by God, existing to serve the purposes of God.

This theologian draws on Hindu sacred texts to justify his use of this image and argues for a particular understanding of what is meant by embodiment, but the image nonetheless has an immediate and powerful effect in forming our perspectives on who we are and how we should act.

We are familiar with bodies, especially our own bodies and with their dependence on their life giving souls. We can easily come to sense how close the relationship is between ourselves and God as his body, and that we should act to express this.

In the passage of John for this Sunday we have the different image of the vine and its branches to express the relationship between Christ and his disciples. The branches of a vine draw their life from the vine and come to bear fruit only if connected to the vine. The branches of a vine have an intimate relationship with the vine, depending on it at all times and forming one living organism with it.

And so it is with Christian discipleship. The disciple is dependent on the inner presence and activity of Christ for the regeneration of his or her own life into one of faith and love. The disciple can only be effective in the regeneration of the lives of others when this is the expression and abundance of that life-giving presence of Christ in his or her own life.

The image of the vine and its branches suggests an intimacy in the relationship between ourselves and Christ. This contrasts with images that distance Christ from us, such as the image of Christ seated in heaven and of us getting on with our lives on earth, with Christ far from us, even though he may act for or upon us.

Images of Christ as king and lord, as shepherd and judge, have their own importance in the enrichment of our perspective on how Christ relates to us. However, they need to be balanced by such images as the vine, which integrate the disciple into the life of Christ and of Christ into the life of the disciple in a unity and closeness which these other images cannot convey.

We may not be all that familiar with vines as such, but we still encounter trees and plants and do not need to have

explained to us how parts of a living organism depend on it. The image of the vine can thus have a powerful effect on our imaginations and hearts, bringing us to an immediate awareness of how Christ is present and active within us.

The sense of the intimate and sustaining presence in all things of the creating and redeeming God has formed a major dynamic in the spiritual life of Christians. It has been said to be the unifying theme of the Western mystical tradition.

This presence becomes felt in silence and individual prayer, in time spent alone with God. Awareness of this presence is something which can come and go and be felt to a greater or lesser degree. The image of the vine and its branches calls us to take seriously the cultivation of awareness of this presence.

Yet it calls us also to see how the cultivation of this presence is not self-indulgence, not just for the delight of the individual Christian. The image of the vine enables us to realise that, just as the presence of Christ is in reality the source of a genuine Christian life for the benefit both of oneself and of others, so awareness of that presence impels the Christian to be active both in growing in one's own love of God and in manifesting that love towards others.

Fr. Martin Robindra Ganeri is Catholic Chaplain to the University of Edinburgh and the Edinburgh College of Art.

HE IS TAKEN UP

Brendan Slevin, O.P.

The Ascension of the Lord (B)

The solemn feast of the Ascension of the Lord is one of those feasts that can bring fear into the life of the preacher. How does one speak or write about this event? There is nothing in our experience that we can use to understand this event.

It is not like death. Jesus died on the cross and is risen to die no more. But neither is it comparable with someone going away. If our friend goes away they go somewhere. We can read about that place, we might even visit them, but Christ is *taken up* beyond the old creation.

In these days when men have walked on the moon, we might be forgiven for thinking that Christ is up there somewhere. Indeed, some have pondered the thought of a spacecraft picking him up. But Christ is not like those brave men who at this very moment are circling overhead in the international space station. Christ is no longer confined by his creation.

What we celebrate today cannot be understood as an isolated incident. It cannot be separated off from the death and resurrection of the Lord, and neither can it be separated off from the descent of the Spirit of the Lord. Death and descent into the grave, rising to new life, ascension into glory

and descent of the Spirit are all parts of a single dynamic unfolding of the divine mystery in time; as well as the unfolding of our new life in the eternal.

In Olivier Messiaen's fourth organ meditation on the ascension, *Priere du Christ montant vers son Pere*, we hear a phrase slowly and relentlessly ascending up the registers until the final unresolved chord hangs there as if suspended in time. A moment becomes an eternity.

Within this moment the confines of human potential have been swept away. Within this eternal moment life becomes endless, the Son returns to the Father, and 'earthbound' creation finds a new home beyond the limits of mortality.

In this endless moment Christ transforms his followers into instruments of the divine. This transformation is both the glorification of the Father in the Son and the glorification of man and woman in Christ. We might say, then, that the ascension is as much about ourselves as it is about Christ.

We tend to focus on Jesus disappearing from sight, but the movement of the divine reaches out beyond the figure of Christ. In Mark's Gospel the ascension is sandwiched between instruction and action. Before the ascension the disciples are sent out by the risen Lord into the world. After the ascension the disciples take up this call and leave behind their former reality to enter into the world as instruments of the divine.

In Mark there is no explicit account of the descent of the Spirit, but we are told that when the disciples went out

into the world the Lord worked with them. In John's Gospel, Jesus comes to the apostles in the locked room and breathes on them and they receive the Spirit.

In the Acts of the Apostles the apostles are in the room when the Spirit descends on them as if it were tongues of fire. But last Sunday we read in Acts 10 that, as Peter was speaking, the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners, even the pagans. The descent of the Spirit is not restricted to one event but streams out from that moment of ascension into all times and places.

Here is the great wonder of the ascension. By being lifted up Christ has not deserted us but made it possible for his Spirit to enter all times and places. In this way it is possible for each of us to be transformed by the power of the Spirit into the agents or instruments of Christ. We become enlivened with his Spirit. Our actions become animated in a new way by the Spirit of the God we love and serve. We have become Christs in the world.

The resurrection, ascension and decent of the Spirit continues to be realised in our lives. We draw on that moment suspended in eternity and hope that it will lead us to eternity with God.

Fr. Brendan Slevin is Chaplain to Strathclyde University in Glasgow.

Cases and Inquiries

JAVIER GONZALEZ, O.P.

MAY CHILDREN OF UNMARRIED PARENTS BE BARRED FROM BAPTISM?

QUESTION:

It has been observed in our Vicariate that the sacrament of baptism has been taken for granted or has not been properly understood. Despite efforts to educate or to prepare the parents and the godparents of the child to be baptized through the Pre-Jordan seminar, baptism hardly shows any positive effect in their lives.

Henceforth we have come out with a Vicariate Policy on Infant Baptism that rationalizes the discipline in our Vicariate on the baptism of infants whose parents are not canonically married. This policy states that,

"... [b] Parents of the child to be baptized must have received the sacrament of matrimony. To ensure this, the church marriage contract of the parents is required;

... [e] Non-fulfillment of these policies would mean no baptism for the child. *But, children whose parents have some problems and impediments to receive the sacrament of matrimony, will be baptized after a thorough investigation of the impossibility of receiving holy matrimony and under the doctrine of Ecclesia supplet.*"

This decision was taken after several vicariate meetings on this issue, one of whose statements that appear in the minutes read as follows:

"As a matter of discipline and for pastoral reasons, children whose parents have not received the sacrament of matrimony of the Church are not to be baptized unless parents receive first the sacrament of matrimony."

Our Most Reverend Bishop, while commending the good intention and initiative of the priests in the vicariate, admonished the Vicar Forane to relax on the implementation of the said policy. The policy, however, is still in effect in the Vicariate.

May I ask you for your comments on our adopted policy that requires for the baptism of infants, the canonical marriage of their parents? Thank you. (A Parish Priest)

ANSWER:

Before offering my solicited comments on your "Vicariate Policy on Infant Baptism" I consider it opportune to review some basic issues related to this topic, namely, the stand of the Church on the practice of baptizing children; the possible reasons for delaying or even refusing an infant baptism; and

the question on whether the children of unmarried parents may be legitimately barred or not from baptism.

1. What is the stand of the Church on the practice of baptizing children?

Under normal circumstances infants are to be baptized "within the first few weeks." Such is the present church provision (can. 867), which modified her previous norm that infants be baptized "as soon as possible." The same provision, after reminding parents of their obligation to have their children baptized, adds: "If the infant is in danger of death, it is to be baptized without any delay."

The Church has baptized children from the earliest times. Her stand on this matter has always been that children or infants, even though they have not yet reached the age of discernment and therefore cannot have or profess personal faith, should not be deprived of baptism. And the explanation she offers in the *Catechism* (cf. nn. 1250-1252) is that just as the origin and growth of the personal life of every child begins immediately upon birth, so does the Christian life of faith in Christ.

The justification of this stand is based on the theological principle that baptism is above all *a free gift of God's grace*, not something merited. Accordingly, infant baptism shows God's initiative in loving the child, the first step actually toward acquiring the fullness of life in Christ.

To those who question the practice of baptizing infants by stressing that baptism as a sacrament of faith involves personal freedom and conversion, the Church simply answers that the children are baptized "in the faith of the Church."

"This faith is proclaimed for them by their parents and godparents, who represent both the local Church and the whole society of saints and believers." (*Rite of Baptism for Children*, 2)

The Church acknowledges, however, that the baptism of infants implies important ministries and roles, the absence of which may, in certain cases condition the very administration of baptism. Parents in particular, before the celebration of the sacrament, are to see to it that their children are baptized without much delay and they are also expected to play a special role during such baptismal celebration. Moreover, after baptism, they have the serious responsibility to enable their baptized children "to know God, to receive confirmation and to participate in the holy Eucharist"; in other words, to see to it that their children are formed in the faith by catholic upbringing as they grow and mature. In order to fulfill this duty they are to be helped by the godparents and, as the *Rite of Baptism* notes, by the parish priest.

Some of these elements are expressed in the Code of Canon Law, which among other things states that -

1) *Parents are obliged to see to it that their infants are baptized within the first few weeks. As soon as possible after the birth, indeed even before it, they are to approach the parish priest to ask for the sacrament for their child, and to be themselves duly prepared for it.* (Can. 867 §1)

2) *For an infant to be baptized lawfully it is required:*

1° *that the parents, or at least one of them, or the person who lawfully holds their place, give their consent;*

2° *that there be a realistic hope that the child will be brought up in the catholic religion. If such hope is truly lacking, the baptism is, in accordance with the provisions of particular law, to be deferred and the parents advised of the reason for this.* (Can. 868 §1)

May the Baptism of Children Be Deferred or Refused?

The answer to this question can be deduced from the above quotation of can. 868 §1, in which two requirements are mentioned for the lawful baptism of children: one, the consent of their parents (or of those who hold the parents' place); and the other, "a realistic hope that the child will be brought up in the catholic religion."

What happens when any or both of them are not fulfilled? What should be done, for instance, when there is no "realistic hope" that the child would be brought up in the catholic religion since the previous children were not given catholic education? The answer is provided for by the above-mentioned law of the Church: *"If such hope is truly lacking, the baptism is, in accordance with the provisions of particular law, to be deferred and the parents advised of the reason for this."*

"To defer," means "to postpone" or to delay, not to refuse permanently. In concrete terms, it means that the parish priest may propose that the child be baptized at a later date while in the meantime maintain pastoral contact with the parents. (The occasion of the baptism of children may become for the parish priest a providential opportunity to help parents revive their faltering faith, or to restore a faith apparently gone, or to "force" their return to the observance of religious duties...).

The reason for the deferral is obvious: Baptizing an infant whose parents have shown no interest in the Church risks, in particular cases, turning baptism into a *magical* action, not a sacramental one. Thus when the Church prescribes, as one of the requirements for a lawful baptism of an infant, a well-founded hope that the child will be brought up in the Catholic religion; and that "if such hope is truly lacking, the baptism is to be deferred and the parents advised of the reason for this," she is trying to convey a message to the parents, namely, that they ought to justify why their child should be baptized! This is not mere legalism, but an attempt to prevent baptism from being a mockery: After all, during the baptismal celebration parents are reminded of an important challenge: *"You have asked to have your child baptized. In doing so you are accepting the responsibility of training him (her) in the practice of the faith. It will be your duty to bring him (her) up to keep God's commandments as Christ taught us, by loving God and our neighbor. Do you understand what you are undertaking?"*

If the parents are unable to make such a commitment to the faith, in ordinary circumstances, the child's baptism should be "deferred" (not "refused") until parents have been better prepared for the baptism of their child, which entails on their part the obligation of seeing to it that the child is brought up in the catholic religion. The decision of the parish priests on this regard may be at times a painful one, but it is an essential one. (In any case, since the decision has to be "in accordance with the provisions of particular law," it follows that the local Ordinary will have normally to be consulted.)

Summarizing, the doctrine of the Church (as reflected in canon 868 and in the 1980 *Instruction on Infant Baptism*

of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith) speaks of the possibility of deferral of infant baptism in some cases, particularly when parents do not give their consent and when there is no realistic hope that the child will be brought up in the catholic religion. In both cases the deferral is "educational" in character, "aimed at helping the family to grow in faith or to become more aware of its responsibilities."

This traditional understanding of the issue does not seem to offer major difficulty. However, if we take a closer and more critical approach to the issue, we discover that the entire matter of the deferral of infants' baptism is not easy at all. To start with, who can truly judge on the existence (or not) of the "realistic hope" that the child will be brought up in the catholic religion? Is not the parents' request for their children's baptism enough assurance? But even if the parents fail, cannot the sufficiency of the assurance of the child's catholic upbringing be forthcoming from some other member of the family, from the godparents or even from the Christian community? In addition, are parish priests keeping up with the spirit of the Church when they follow a policy of systematic refusal to baptize the children of lapsed Catholics? And, finally, is it fair to deprive children of baptism just because their parents live a tepid Christian life or do not live a Christian life at all? These are new questions that deserve an answer, too.

Once I heard a theologian saying that the children's baptism is not a reward for the behavior of their parents, nor can its denial ever be used as a punishment for the parents' bad conduct: The only element to consider is *the good of the children*.

I fully subscribe to this principle. Hence, I believe that even if parents live a tepid christian life (or do not live a

christian life at all), their children *may still be baptized*, provided that the catholic education of these children is assured. After all, a sufficient assurance of catholic upbringing may come, as mentioned before, from some other members of the family or from the godparents or even from the community of the faithful itself.

Regarding the parish priests' attitude of *systematic* refusal to baptize the children of fallen-away or lapsed Catholics, I do not think this is in keeping with the spirit of the Church. There are those who think that when parents ask for their children to be baptized, the presumption is that there is sufficient hope for their catholic education. Of course, there should be the moral possibility of procuring a catholic education at least in school or in the parish, if not at home.

On whether it is fair or not to deprive children of baptism on account of their parents' fault, we will deal with it in the next question on whether the children of unmarried parents may be barred from baptism.

May Children of Unmarried Parents Be Barred from Baptism? Some Contrasting Opinions.

It was a few years ago, in the year 2000, when an Anglican priest by the name of Rev. Donald Allister hit the national headlines for telling parents in his parish that they *would have to marry before their children could be baptized*. Why? Because, in his opinion, cohabiting couples were not in a position to make the baptismal promise of living in accordance with Christian beliefs and practice."

The news caused some commotion. Even some Catholic media reacted that it would be wrong to deprive children of

the sacrament because their parents were living together out of wedlock. Likewise, a good number of priests felt it "unfair" to "penalize a child who is not at fault." An angry parishioner was quoted as saying, "This will make unmarried couples feel like lepers. Marriage is not an easy step to take and some just don't want to do it anymore. How can the Church drive people away just because they are not officially husband and wife? They should be pleased that children are being introduced to the Church at a young age!"

The story could go on and on. My point here is that the baptism of children of unmarried parents has always been a controversial issue and it continues being so today in many parishes, both here in the Philippines and abroad. I remember being myself involved in a lively open forum on this topic during one of the annual National Conventions of the Canon Law Society of the Philippines.

The parameters of the discussion are invariably the same: (1) On one hand, the importance (need) of baptism and the obligation parents have to see to it that their children are baptized soon after birth. (2) On the other hand, the recommendation of the Church that there should be a well-founded hope that the infant will be brought up in the Catholic religion, with baptism deferred if this hope is "altogether lacking" (c. 868). (3) In between, the facts: Many of those approaching parish offices to have their children baptized are either never married, living together without benefit of marriage, or in an adulterous relationship where one or both parties have been married in the Church and may not even be separated civilly; in addition, one or both parents do not attend church or receive the Sacraments; but they want to

baptize their children because it is the custom of the family or out of fear that something bad may happen to the child if he/she dies.

With such parameters, no wonder there are different opinions among ecclesiastical authorities (bishops, parish priests...) and consequently different diocesan/parochial policies on the administration of baptism to children of unmarried parents. Should they be baptized? Some, like those citing the case of our consultation, say 'no': "children whose parents have not received the sacrament of matrimony of the Church are not to be baptized unless parents receive the sacrament of matrimony first" (except in cases of impossibility). Others, on the contrary, say 'yes': "children of unmarried parents should not be barred from baptism, for the sacramental baptism of children is not to be subordinated to the sacramental marriage of their parents." Obviously, we are referring to ordinary situations (not life or death situations) and to the lawfulness of the baptism (not its validity). Who are right and who are wrong? I do not consider myself an authority to answer this question, among other things, because the truth is neither entirely on one side or the other; rather, there are some elements of truth on both sides. In the absence of new official declarations on the matter, it is instructive to listen to different opinions.

The CLSA *Text and Commentary on the Code of Canon Law* (1983) noted that in cases of "non-practicing" Christian parents (defined as those "who are polygamous, unmarried, married lawfully but lapsed altogether from the regular practice of the faith, or those who request for their child's baptism as a purely social convention") *the baptism of the*

child should go ahead if the guarantees concerning the Catholic upbringing of the children are sufficient in the judgment of the parish priest; but it should be deferred if the conditions are insufficient, while the parents are catechized and prepared for the rite of reception of their child for baptism (cf. p. 627).

"I would think the 'realistic hope' of educating the children in the faith is lacking altogether if the parents choose to live outside the married state," says a parish priest, interpreting canon 868. The same can be said of unmarried couples or of couples married in the Church but cohabiting with other people without having been civilly separated nor having applied for the declaration of nullity process in the Church... "In these cases there is no any 'well-founded hope' that the children will ever be educated in the Catholic religion after baptism."

Another contrasting opinion: "I disagree that baptism should be denied to parents who are non-practicing Catholics. As long as there is someone who will be responsible for raising the child Catholic - grandparents, a godparent, etc. - the Church will baptize the baby."

In the end, one does not know whether it would be desirable that Episcopal Conferences and dioceses take a common stand on the matter or leave the final decision in each case to the parish priest. For, indeed, the policy adopted in most parishes when unmarried parents apply for the baptism of their children is "that they must speak first with the parish priest." In short, the final decision is left to the personal discretion of the parish priest. The result is obvious: some are rigid, others are more flexible.

What are my Comments on the "no marriage, no baptism" adopted policy?

At the outset, I have to say that the issue of deferring the sacrament of baptism to children of unmarried parents until the latter are married in the Church is indeed controversial. As mentioned above, there are different legitimate opinions on the matter. Mine, is just one of them.

My departure point is your statement taken from the minutes of one of your vicarial meetings on this issue: "As a matter of discipline and for pastoral reasons, *children whose parents have not received the sacrament of matrimony of the Church are not to be baptized unless parents receive the sacrament of matrimony first.* [...] Thus, prior to the child's reception of the sacrament of baptism, parents must have received the sacrament of matrimony."

My comments on this statement are the following:

1. I truly admire the priests' pastoral zeal for the "salvation" of the unmarried parents by forcing them to get married in the Church, even using as a means for it the refusal of baptism to their children. However, since the end does not justify the means, it is my conviction that this cannot be done at the expense of punishing those children to the point of committing a grave injustice to them! One example: What would you think if those same children were not accepted to any school at all simply because their parents are not married? Would it not be unfair to deprive them of their primary and secondary education only because of the irregular legal status of their parents? Would it not be an injustice to deprive them of their right to education because of something they are not

responsible for? If this sounds unfair, how much more will it be depriving them of the sacrament of Baptism!

2. By subordinating the baptism of the children to the marriage of their parents it seems that both sacraments - baptism and marriage - are placed on equal footing in terms of importance, when in fact, theologically speaking, there is no point of comparison between them. The former (baptism) is much more "important" than the latter, since it is necessary for salvation, something we cannot say of marriage. This is evident by looking at the effects of baptism listed in canon 849: "*Baptism, the gateway to the sacraments, is necessary for salvation, either by actual reception or at least by desire. By it people are freed from sins, are born again as children of God and, made like to Christ by an indelible character, are incorporated into the Church.*" Are we going to deny a child these wonderful ontological-spiritual effects, wanted even for the child by his parents, just for the latter's wrong behavior?
3. In the sacrament of baptism *God has the initiative, not we*. If God, out of His love for us, wants to give us freely his divine life, who are we to prevent Him from doing so? Must we deprive a child of such divine life simply because of the legal situation of his/her parents? This is a theological note we priests should take into account when administering the sacrament of baptism. And this is surely the reason why the Church provides that "an infant of catholic parents, indeed even of non-catholic parents,

is lawfully baptized *in danger of death*, even if the parents are opposed to it." (can. 868 §2)

4. Of course, certain guarantees for the faith of the children being baptized are to be desired, like the assurance that they will be brought up in the catholic religion. Ideally, they must grow up in the bosom of a Christian home, with parents and godparents, who are practicing Catholics etc., to which the required pre-Jordan seminar and/or catechesis previous to baptism are oriented. Moreover, in the case of unmarried parents, it would be beneficial to take advantage of the child's baptism to pressure them to regularize their marital status to a certain extent. "Marriage," as the parishioner quoted before said, "is not an easy step to take and some just don't want to do it anymore."

On the other hand, and with much respect for contrary opinions, I do not think that the unmarried status of the parents is by itself an absolute proof of the lack of 'realistic hope' for the child to be brought up in the catholic religion. For even if the parents fail, a sufficient assurance of the child's catholic upbringing could come from some other members of the family, from the godparents or even from the christian community. So, this and other factors can only call for a temporary *deferral* (postponement) of baptism, but never an absolute *refusal* to the child.

After all, such is the spirit of canon 868, which speaks only of deferral of baptism, not of refusal, understanding such measure not as a form of discrimination, but really as an "*educational delay* aimed

at helping the family to grow in faith or to become more aware of its responsibilities" (*Instruction on Infant Baptism*, 28).

In extreme and concrete cases, perhaps such "educational delay" might have to become indefinite (although with the door always open); but it should not be as a matter of policy or "systematic refusal" of infant baptism.

5. Based on these reasons, I find your vicariate policy "no marriage, no baptism" a bit too much. It is true that you cite a commendable exception to it, namely, the case of "parents who have some problems and impediments to receive the sacrament of matrimony, in which case their child will be baptized after a thorough investigation of the impossibility of receiving holy matrimony." Even so, in this sense I find wise the admonition of your Bishop to relax on the implementation of the said policy. In Roman law there is the saying, "*Summum ius, summa iniuria*" which could be translated thus, "Justice brought to the extreme becomes injustice." (Something like the Pharisees' *perfectionism* condemned by Jesus.) No doubt, the good intention of the priests in your vicariate in striving for the sacramental marriage of their parishioners is truly commendable; however, the policy of putting heavier weight on the canonical marriage of the parents than on the administration of baptism of their children, if taken to the extreme, may become a plain injustice. Will it not?
6. I hope I am not misunderstood as undervaluing the importance of the sacramental marriage. What I

want to say is that it cannot be used as "counter change" or as a *conditio sine qua non* for another excellent thing, as the sacramental baptism... of another person! This happens in some parishes of Mindanao where parish priests refuse to baptize the children of those parents who are not BEC active members. Both things should not be exclusive of each other, but be pursued separately through catechesis and apostolic ministry. And one more point to reinforce my opinion: While it is true that "to fulfill the true meaning of the sacrament, children must later be formed in the faith in which they have been baptized" (*Rite of Baptism*, n.3), it is also true that children *are not baptized simply in the faith of their parents, but in the faith of the Church!*

7. Other points and insights mentioned in the Vicariate Policy, like the *Reflections*, *Challenges*, *Policy* (letters a, c, and d) and *Effects...* deserve positive evaluation.
8. In closing, to summarize my comments, I agree with the "delay" of infant baptism in the cases mentioned, but not with its systematic "refusal." If an indiscriminate administration of baptism is not countenanced by church law, neither is an indiscriminate refusal of it. Care must be taken that "pastoral considerations" do not interfere with the greater good of the child. Parish priests, who in the end are given the prerogative to decide on the individual cases "in accordance with the provisions of particular law," ought to think that a "disproportionate" delay of baptism may become a *clerical abuse* of children!