

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO de FILIPINAS

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A PASTORAL EXHORTATION
ON CHARTER CHANGE AND
THE COMMON GOOD
*Catholic Bishops' Conference
of the Philippines*

LIVING THE PASCHAL
MYSTERY
fGaudencio B. Rosales, DD

GOD'S HOPE FOR
HUMANITY
Hon. Artemio V. Panganiban

SACRED HEART SEMINARY
IN PALO, LEYTE: PAST,
PRESENT AND FUTURE
Ramon Aguilos, MSEM, STD

BOLETIN ECLESIASTICO DE FILIPINAS

The Official Interdiocesan Bulletin

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EDITORIAL

The months of November and December involve a peculiar sequence of "holy-days" in the Church calendar. Nothing, however, in the histories of All Saints and All Souls days and of Advent and Christmas point to the present dates being deliberately strung next to each other.

But despite the usual barrage of statements on the apparently worsening indifference to the doctrinal aspect of the celebrations, their temporal succession could actually be furthering the Church's evangelical intentions in ways more weaved into the people's lives than any of the doctrines themselves.

At the risk of being simplistic, we suppose it is also not amiss to say that the November-December holy-days summarize Catholic belief in this wise: death in its literal and figurative forms is ultimately balanced if not entirely conquered by hope in life eternal, represented no less than by the birth of the life-giver, Jesus the Christ.

Death

In the country, November 1 and 2 are dates immediately connoted with images of Catholics and other Christians alike flocking to cemeteries, columbaries, or wherever their dead are buried to commemorate the latter's lives as well as pray for the eternal repose of their souls. In the

rural areas, a mass is even scheduled in cemeteries to unite this prayer, followed by the priest walking the entire grounds to sprinkle holy water on each grave and tomb (in some places, however, the act of sprinkling holy water has been delegated to the people themselves).

But these days, All Saints and All Souls days have become some kind of a national hoopla, with full media coverage tracking every activity and forcing out the strangest of stories that are supposedly of human interest, such as, for example, how and where politicians visit their dear departed, or how departed politicians are remembered.

Meanwhile, burial grounds also increasingly become a reason to congregate, whether it be friends or family that gather. Not many instances the gathering is one of prayerful solemnity, or sobriety for that matter. Even in the provinces, the young are already taking after their merry-making fathers, grandfathers, uncles, or just whoever they have witnessed at one time or other* in turning the grim atmosphere of cemeteries livelier with food, drink and music blaring from radios.

Despite these trimmings, however, the underlying reasons for this November commemoration are still undeniably unchanging.

Especially among Filipinos, the closeness of family ties is inevitably affirmed, and is not severed even by death; that, perhaps, is the most convincing factor that pushes many of us to bother and travel great distances just to be able to light a candle. That is only insofar as our link to the dead is involved. Also important, families that have been separated by their respective careers have

a chance to come together, taking advantage of the reprieve from work.

And no matter how people come to remember the dead nowadays, the cause of remembering is still our unshakeable belief that souls are ultimately treading on a path to the beatific vision, and our prayers are intended to assist them on this path.

Life

Follows the season of Advent, The name is revealing; Advent is a season of waiting for an arrival. The wait is characterized by eager anticipation and a clear excitement, the arrival being no less than that of Jesus through his birth.

The Advent season helps us focus on the, event of the savior's birth by drawing us closer to it in spirit and practice. The four Sundays allotted before Christmas Eve were liturgically designed for that purpose.

But again, it is feared that Advent and Christmas have been reduced into a habit. The focus is more on the embellishments - this time of gifts, bright lights, decors of red, green, and silver, and a Noche Buena feast. For working professionals and employees, topmost in their minds is the thought of the Christmas bonus or the thirteenth month pay, and if that is enough to buy food and gifts. Carolers map out routes that would hit the homes of the more able and generous. Children plot strategies, often with their parents, on how to take the most out of their godparents' pockets (a phenomenon that has also mutated the concept of sponsoring a child's baptism, but that is another story).

And yet, despite the seeming concentration on the self, the season is also, ironically and almost miraculously, a time when spirits (of the living, this time) are euphoric enough to make selflessness a fact. There seems to be plenty during this time of the year, although that term is relative. But the fact remains that for a while, cares are forgotten and there are plenty of smiles and greetings to go around.

Beneath all these trappings, of course, is the celebration of the birth of Christ. Dropping the historical context of the Christmas season, Christ's birth continues to flood Christendom with hope. Unlike other dates in the liturgical calendar, however, Christmas has turned into a worldwide event, encompassing all faiths, reason for urgent demands to strip it of its Catholic cover and change it into something universal.

To be witty, and maybe a little heckling, however, the word "catholic" does mean "universal", and to strip Christmas of its Catholic aspect would be to render the season meaningless. Because even for non-Catholics, the nativity story, without its doctrinal elements (again at the risk of being simplistic), should be inspirational - that of a lowly carpenter's child born in a lowly manger but who is to be mankind's savior.

That story is inevitably linked to the season, and no matter how we celebrate it, the reason remains the same: hope which springs eternal in a new life of good will and peace among men, inspired by that birth.

THE EDITOR

What's the Point of Praying for the Dead?

EAMON DUFFY

Prayer for the dead isn't appeasement or fire insurance. We pray for them because we know they're still alive—in Christ.

I grew up in the fifties in a small town on the east coast of Ireland. Neither my family nor the wider community struck me, then or since, as especially pious; but religion was everywhere, and it was a religion in which the dead were more or less continuously present. Collection boxes stood at the back of every church for "the Holy Saints." The dead were remembered as part of every public prayer, even grace before meals, which always ended with petitions for eternal rest and light perpetual on the souls of the faithful departed. Our prayer books were stuffed with memorial cards, pious bookmarks whose stilted inscriptions and blurred photographs reminded us of the obligation to pray for departed friends and relatives. Every year during Easter we walked in a straggling procession

the mile or more to the town cemetery for the annual blessing of the graves: the week before was a period of intensive clearing and tidying of family plots, in which it would be hard to say whether grief, devotion or the determination not to let the family down in front of the neighbors had the upper hand.

All Souls Day, on November 2, was not a holiday of obligation, but everyone with any pretensions to religion went to Mass, the liturgy notable for the somber black vestments in which the celebrant was swathed. The De La Salle Brothers who ran our local school explained that we could gain an indulgence which would release a soul from purgatory during every visit to a church that day, in the course of which we recited five "Our Fathers" and five "Hail Marys" for the pope's intentions. There was no limit on how many times this indulgence could be gained, so the pious or the elderly with a lot of dead friends and relatives could be seen going in and out of church all day long, chalking up indulgences, the wing-beats of the ransomed beating joyously about their ears.

Behind all this was a very clear geography of the afterlife, charting every detail of the fate of the departed. That geography had taken 1,000 years to evolve. There is little or no explicit mention of prayer for the dead in the New Testament, but invocations for the peace of the departed occur among the earliest Christian grave inscriptions, and the dead are commemorated in ancient liturgical texts like the Canon of the Mass. A few theologians, like St. Augustine and St Gregory the Great, speculated about the existence of a state of painful purga-

tion by fire through which the imperfectly or belatedly penitent must pass before they were granted the beatific vision, but a full-blown theology of purgatory did not emerge until the beginning of the second millennium.

Here, as so often in Christian history, theory lagged well behind practice. The Western liturgy of mourning for and in commemoration of the dead reached its decisive form not in the parishes or dioceses of the Church at large, but in the monasteries of the Middle Ages. There, in close-knit communities in which the memories of dead brethren were lovingly cherished, and in which there were large numbers of religious and priests with time to pray, intercession for the dead came to be seen as one of the chief obligations - and benefits - of monastic life. Soon the lay patrons, benefactors and clients of the monasteries sought a share in this benefit, paying to have their names included on the lists of those prayed for in the monasteries, even acquiring graves in monastic precincts. The liturgy of the wider Church began to absorb and imitate the services of intercession for the dead evolved in the monasteries.

Alongside this liturgical and devotional development went a legal and theological rationale. How did prayer benefit the dead? Theologians elaborated the theory of a middle state between heaven and hell, in which all those who had died in a state of grace (but imperfectly purged of the aftermath of sin) would be cleansed and prepared for heaven. Sin repented for would not exclude from heaven, but it left behind an aftermath, a burden of damages or of "satisfaction" to be worked off in acts of penance - self-denial and self-punishment, charity to the poor, prayer.

But what of those who died with such penance incomplete? Purgatory was the answer to that question, imagined as a period of time granted or imposed after death in which the unfinished business of satisfactory penance could be completed. The prayers of those still on earth, and works of penance or of charity carried out on behalf of or in solidarity with the dead, could shorten this period of post-mortem penance, and this, it was thought, explained the Church's immemorial custom of praying for the dead.

The picture language of the Bible on the afterlife suggested a paradise garden of bliss for those in heaven, and a cellar full of torments for those in hell. Since purgatory was the place where sin was punished and removed, it was felt that it must resemble hell more than heaven. And "place" was the operative word: most of those who reflected on the subject thought it must be a real place, a prison which was part of the geography of hell, only not quite so deep or dark, and with exits available when the sentence was complete.

There were always those uneasy with this account of things, and the greatest imaginative vision of the afterlife composed in the Middle Ages, Dante's *Commedia*, broke free from this suffocating gloom to offer a poetic vision of purgatory which relocated it more securely within the context of the Gospel. For Dante, too, purgatory was a place; however, for him it was not a pit of despair, but a mountain of hope, reaching up into the light, and the sufferings there were designed to heal, not to punish.

The dominant color in purgatory is green, the color of hope and of renewal, and as Dante begins his ascent of the mountain of repentance after his traumatic descent into the pit of hell, Virgil, his guide, gently washes the tears and filth of sin from his face, foreshadowing the work of renewal which is the business of purgatory.

By the end of the Middle Ages belief in purgatory had become one of the most vivid aspects of Catholicism, and prayer for the dead had become the chief activity of most clergy. In England, parish priests were outnumbered three to one by priests employed on fixed-term contracts singing Masses and reciting prayers for the repose of the souls of the more prosperous laity. One of medieval England's greatest poets, William Langland, was himself a lay clerk employed to recite psalms and prayers for the dead.

The Protestant reformers swept all that away. The whole idea of purgatory was rooted in the Catholic understanding of penance, and this the reformers thought false, for it seemed to place salvation in human effort and voluntary human suffering. Trust in God alone could save us. At death those with faith in the Cross of Christ went straight to heaven, those without went straight to hell.

Unintentionally the reformers drove a wedge between the living and the dead: the saints did not pray for *m*, and we could do nothing for the dead. In effect, the dead were cut off from the great web of mutual love and

support which was Church. And in practice, the reformed doctrine struck the Church dumb at the graveside of sinners.

Reformed funeral rites, like that in the Book of Common Prayer, rejoiced that the Christian died "in sure and certain hope of resurrection to eternal life." But how could such confidence be spoken at the graveside of a murderer, a child abuser, an oppressor of the poor - or of the merely mediocre?

With a larger charity and a deeper wisdom, the Catholic Church had from time immemorial insisted that at every graveside, whether of saint or sinner, we might say the same prayer - "Lord, have mercy." In that prayer the Church expressed neither fear nor self-reliance, but faith and hope in the God who can bring meaning out of horror, and who loves even the unlovely.

For behind all the contradictory Catholic imaginings lay a piercing perception, that even for those who love God, death leaves unfinished business - damaged and damaging relationships, misunderstandings unresolved, words of love or apology or explanation unspoken, the need to forgive, and to be forgiven. What are we to do with such pain and incompleteness, but place it in the hands of God? In silencing prayer for the dead, the reformers left no space in prayer for these realities, and left Christians with no language except that of triumph in which to pray about the often far from triumphant experience of mortality.

The essence of belief in purgatory was not the horror stories of the preachers and visionaries, but the conviction

that even for those who died with their faith weak, their love imperfect, there might be healing at the hands of a loving redeemer. Prayer for the dead is neither fear nor fire insurance, emphatically not an attempt to appease an angry or sadistic God. It is an exercise in the virtues of faith and hope and love.

For prayer for the dead is also a bridge across the gulf of separation which is death. We are social beings, but most of us can expect to die alone, in a hospital bed rather than in our homes. Death is the ultimate alienation, the sacramental expression of all the barriers which divide us. Medieval Christianity witnessed against that isolation by constantly remembering the dead, recalling their names, in the liturgy and in private: the dead remained part of the church community. The Reformation, in silencing all naming of the dead in prayer, unwittingly endorsed the experience of death as alienation.

Images of purgatory come and go, some better than others, none of them essential. We do not pray for the dead to bail them out of prison or to placate a God who demands satisfaction, but because we know that they live in Christ, bound to us in a single faith and hope and love, and therefore with a right to a place in our prayers. We feel ourselves diminished by their deaths, and that has a reality in faith as well as in natural experience.

Salvation is complete for none until it is complete for all: the whole of creation groans as it waits for redemption, and our prayers for the dead, like our belief that the saints pray for us, is a concrete expression of

that conviction. In praying for the dead we pray also for ourselves, for we are only ourselves in relation to those who have shaped us and loved us, we are only ourselves in the company of our brothers and sisters. Praying for them, we put into words the pathos and the pain of our shared humanity. In the face of sin, ours and theirs, and confronted with the apparent waste, obscurity and isolation of death, we affirm our faith and hope in die God who creates us all, who loves us all and who wills to redeem us all.



Thoughts on All Saints Day*

FR. PAUL WEINBERGER

One of my favorite writers of comics is Larson, creator of the Far Side. He had a cartoon showing a man and his dog. The dog was sitting on the floor in the kitchen and balancing a dog biscuit on her nose. The man was evidently very proud of how he had trained his dog; the dog understood exactly what her owner was saying. It was amazing. They were of one mind and I worry about that because if they were of one mind it means someone had really sunk down low.

Anyway, the owner was giving the same speech he gave when he wanted to impress someone, about how the dog, Ginger, could hold that bone on top of her nose until he gave a command for her to toss it up and eat it. So the cartoon reads like this. The front of the card said,

*St. William's Catholic Parish, Greenville, Texas. November 1, 2005,
All Saints Day.

WHAT WE SAY

"Ok Ginger hold it, hold it. Good girl Ginger, hold it, hold it Ginger, hold it."

When you opened the card it said,

WHAT DOGS HEAR

"Blah, blah, blah, Ginger. Blah, blah, blah, Ginger. Blah, blah, blah, Ginger.

We think that there is such a mind meld.

Just a few months ago I was in the cafeteria just before the Sunday afternoon Holy Hour and there was a little boy there, Carlton Ehrman. Carlton is a very good child and as his parents say,

"And then he wakes up!"

I always ask Carlton if he is being good and then I say,

"Of course not, you are awake.

Carlton is usually asleep on the front row here and everyone would recognize him if they saw him. Anyway I was showing Carlton a picture that someone had given me. It had a triangle at the top and beneath the triangle was a monstrance with a consecrated Host. Below the monstrance there was a lamb that had been slain and the lamb was on top of a book with seven seals and on either side of this picture were two angels. So I was telling Carlton, who was four at the time,

"This triangle up here represents God the Father and this monstrance with the consecrated Host is Jesus. *He was with me there; his parents had taught him about this by*

taking him to Benediction. I continued Now, this is a Lamb and this is Jesus.

Carlton looked at me as if I were pulling his leg and said,

•Uh uhhhh"

His older brother probably pulled his leg a lot so he thought I was doing the same thing, right? How could that be Jesus in the Host and then this Lamb be Jesus? That is not Jesus; Jesus is on the Cross over there. But if you look right past the cross there is a big picture that I just went by my dad's home today and picked up because I am storing it there. This is a famous picture and the original picture is so large that it could fill the entire back wall of this church and then some.

The original picture is in a church in Belgium. The church in Belgium is dead; the Catholic Church in Belgium is dead so the church that houses this picture is now a museum. Thanks be to God that they didn't sell this church and is now a museum. They have preserved this piece and it is called the Ghent Altarpiece by Jan van Eyck.

Above that panel pictured over there, is God the Father seated on the Throne with the Blessed Virgin Mary at His side. It is just such a full representation of what we hear on this Feast of All Saints Day in the Book of Revelation, from chapter seven. All the people in the picture are coming in from every direction without crowding or pushing because this is Heaven and we don't push in Heaven. The people are of all shapes and sizes, young and old, and are from every race, nation, and people. They are surrounding the Altar of God in Heaven. On top

of the Altar is a Lamb and the side of the Lamb has been pierced. The Blood of the Lamb is flowing into a Chalice. This is beautiful imagery.

The Book of Revelation is as if God is pulling back the curtain of Heaven and allowing us to peer in; in fact, that is exactly what it is. St. John is given a vision of Heaven and is told to write it down. It is a beautiful image of how, in Heaven if we make it there, we will be surrounding an altar where Jesus is and will be praising God for all eternity. The Beatitudes we heard today, which are from the Gospel on the Sermon on the Mount, in my opinion, is like one of those medallions you see in detective stories where two people make a covenant or pact, and in order to prove that they are heir to that covenant or pact they take a medallion and break it in an irregular angle and each takes half. Later on they take the medallion and put it back together and the story is over, right? I believe that this is only part of the medallion; the other part is the Lives of the Saints.

If you actually took the Sermon on the Mount and approached your children or grandchildren and said to them,

"Oh this is the Sermon on the Mount and it is beautiful. Now Suzie this is the Sermon on the Mount and look right here; Jesus is saying to look at those who hunger. And look Johnnie, the clean of heart... oh this Sermon on the Mount is just so beautiful."

What Suzie and Johnnie are actually hearing is,

"Blah, blah, blah, Suzie. Blah, blah, blah, Johnnie."

You talk to your children and grandchildren and they say,

"Gee mom, dad, if this Gospel makes you this happy then we are so happy for you but, we have no clue of what you are talking about. Can I go and play now?"

At the end of the Jubilee Year 2000, the Holy Father wrote a beautiful Apostolic Letter called *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, which has been greatly ignored. In this letter, Pope John Paul II wrote that what we need today is the theology of the saints. Last night I turned on Mother Angelica on EWTN and there was a panel of very astute Catholic men and among them was Regis Martin, Fr. Scanlon, Scott Hahn, and a Dr. Glenn Olson, who had just written a book. I only got to hear part of the show but this was a very interesting panel to assemble. Dr. Martin, who had spoken on Blessed Sacrament a couple of times, is a great husband and father. The men were discussing Dr. Olson's book and Dr. Martin said that what is missing today in the Church is an understanding of the Communion of the Saints.

Last year I was talking to a very wonderful elderly priest who many of you know, Fr. Carl Vogel. At the time of Confirmation the kids are told that they will not be confirmed without a saint's name so they have to pick the name of a saint. The kids come forward and the Bishop calls out their saint's name and says, "Be sealed with the Holy Spirit", and so on with each person. If someone comes forward and they don't have a tag with a saint's name in it, he can't say, "St. Blah Blah, be sealed with the Holy Spirit." You just won't be confirmed. So I asked Fr. Vogel if he'd ever been to a Confirmation and heard a sermon given about the Lives of the Saints and he said he

never had. I told him that I had heard one the year before but it probably didn't count because I preached it.

Here we have a Holy Day of Obligation and if many people ask their children and grandchildren about the Holy Day called All Saints Day, the parents would probably just get some blah, blah answer and then they would ask to go out and play. If children understand that, after we get all the work done then we can go to Six Flags, you talk about children getting that work done quickly. You have never seen brothers and sisters working together so good; you would think they were the Waltons. They know that on the other end is Six Flags and they are working together, helping each other, which is great to see and it is sad that we don't see it more often. But, when we talk to our children about Heaven, we have to admit that we don't do it enough. It is like the beginning of that fictional movie, the Wizard of Oz, they tell Dorothy that she must start at the beginning but they tell her that they have no idea where she is going. Oh no, from the very beginning she knows that her goal is Oz and that she has to talk with the Wizard that lives there.

Children need to be motivated concerning Heaven and the other part of this key with the Sermon on the Mount are the individual lives of the Saints who have been declared along with the unauthorized versions known as our relatives, friends and strangers. For example, just over a hundred years ago there was a young girl that had just made her first communion. She was about twelve years old and was brutally killed by a man living in the same apartments with her widowed mother and her. This young girl's name was Maria Goretti. Alessandro Serenelli and his

father lived in an apartment in the same complex that Maria lived in, which was in a very poor area of Italy. Alessandro had made passes at this very beautiful young girl.

While her mother was assuming the burden of bringing in the crops after her husband died of malaria, Maria was taking on the cares of the house; you know, she would load the washer and program the microwave... oh wait, those had not been invented yet and there was no electricity so she really had a lot of work to do. She never complained and even after she finished all the chores she asked her mother to allow her to walk to the nearby town for a catechism class so she could make her first communion. I'm sorry, but if I had not had parents who pushed me along I would probably be in jail right now, who knows!

Anyway, here is the twelve-year-old girl walking by herself to the next town and she didn't have to do this but she wanted to make her first communion and she did. It wasn't long after this that Alessandro attacked her. He waited until his father was at the barn taking a nap and Mrs. Goretti was out on the tractor. Maria was out on the top stair doing the mending because back then instead of throwing clothes away that were torn, people used to mend them. So Maria was out mending and Alessandro ran up the stairs past her and ordered her inside. Of course she didn't go so Alessandro went into his room and slammed the door.

As a young man of nineteen, from floor to ceiling in his room, he had papered his walls with pornography so that from any point in the room he could see the pornography.

Alessandro stayed in his room for a while and then went into the next room, which was the kitchen and again yelled to Maria to get inside. She wouldn't go so he went to where she was mending and taking care of the sibling/baby and dragged Maria into the kitchen while leaving the baby on top of the second story stairs.

Mrs. Goretti looks up from the tractor and sees the baby unattended and doesn't see Maria so she gets off the tractor and runs to the house finding her daughter crawling out to the landing having been stabbed many times and critically injured. Maria was rushed by "ambulance", come on "giddy up"; that is the kind of ambulance they had. They rushed her to the hospital but they didn't want to use anesthetic because there was danger of death. She was already dying. They couldn't give her any water because she might choke and die. Well, she died after twenty-four hours of incredible pain. The priest came and before he gave her Holy Communion he said to her,

"Maria, do you forgive Alessandro Serenelli?"

This twelve-year-old girl with no education said to the priest, probably through gasps and blood,

"Yes Father, I forgave him immediately and I want him to be with me in Heaven."

She died and Alessandro was tried, pleaded guilty and was sent to jail. He didn't repent at all and thought nothing of having killed Maria. Then one night he had a dream and Maria appeared to him in all of her Heavenly beauty with an arm full of lilies, which is the symbol for purity or as the translation here says, clean of heart. It was from that dream that Alessandro was converted. He

had been like a rock in opposing it, but finally allowed a priest to hear his confession. Eventually he was released and once released he went and knocked on the door of a Franciscan Monastery, The woman that answered the door was Mrs. Goretti. He fell down and asked her forgiveness for having killed her daughter. She said to Alessandro,

"Of course I forgive you. If Maria has forgiven you then so do I."

When Pope Pius XII canonized Maria about fifty years after her martyrdom, Alessandro was in attendance along with Mrs. Goretti and Maria's siblings who were now grown. Maria is a perfect example of someone who was pure and clear of heart and always thinking about Heaven.

"Yes Alessandro, of course I forgive you and I want you to be with me in Heaven."

We don't think of Heaven enough; it is not on that channel, right? Yet, here is the Feast of All Saints, which is to get our attention back on heaven because tomorrow's feast is not about All Saints, it is about All Souls, meaning those poor souls in purgatory who are not in Heaven yet Of course for some reason we think we are just going to bypass Purgatory and shoot right into Heaven. I pray that this happens but in the meantime there is a crisis of saints and it is not the bishop's fault.

The other day I was outside and there was a child, I told him I was sorry his leg was broken and asked how long had it been that way. He asked me what I meant because his leg wasn't broken. I told him I figured his leg must be broken because he didn't come to say hello to

me, right? It is not the bishop's responsibility to learn about the saints. I remember in either the 4th or 6th grade, every kid in the Diocese went down to the Majestic Theatre to see the Life of Saint Maria Goretti. Of course we know that today everyone is pure... yea... or as Carlton would say, "Uh Uhhh!"

This Sermon on the Mount is absolutely useless if children today are not shown the Communion of Saints in all its vivid color and grandeur. In the Communion of Saints there are boys and girls and men and women of every stripe, race, creed, color and nation and they have met challenges greater than you and I have and have responded with "I BELIEVE" in God the Father Who is seated on the Throne, and in His Son Jesus Christ Who is the Lamb.

After this I had a vision of a great multitude, which no one could count from every race, nation, people, and tongue. They stood before the Throne and before the Lamb wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. They cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation comes from our God Who is seated on the Throne, and from the Lamb."

The Christmas Season

DENNIS BRATCHER

Among all the festivals and holidays of the Christian Church year, Christmas remains the most observed and most popular. Of course, much of that popularity, especially in the West, is due to the commercial promotion of the holiday. In many areas of the world, it is still a rather insignificant holiday even among Christians. Still, the Christmas story captures the heart in a way that transcends all the commercial hype.

The degree to which the holiday is valued in Christian culture even goes beyond the other most Holy Day of Christianity, Easter or Resurrection Sunday. There is something about human nature that would rather focus on the birth of babies than on the torture and death of accused criminals! Especially for the young, the story of Christmas with all the images of angels and a young mother, of shepherds and a stable, of wise men and royal intrigue make the season captivating. Perhaps that is part of the intent of the different ways the story is told in the Gospel accounts, as well as the preservation

of so many traditions in the Church surrounding this holiday.

Historically, Christmas commemorates the birth of Jesus of Nazareth to a young maiden from Galilee. Theologically, Christmas is the celebration of the incarnation of God in Jesus the Christ, the self-revelation of God to the world in human form for the reconciliation of humanity to Himself. All the details of the various accounts concerning Jesus' birth revolve around that central truth (see *The Meaning of Christmas* below).

While we most often think about Christmas as a single day, it is actually a season of the year. In its popular sense, it extends four weeks before Christmas Day and for two weeks after. However, the time before Christmas is a special season called *Advent*, comprising the four Sundays before Christmas Day. While the entire season of Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany can be seen together, they each have distinctly different roles in the Church year. The term "Advent" means "coming" and is a season of expectation and hope, the time of waiting for the coming of the Messiah that is celebrated at Christmas. This time of waiting symbolizes the waiting throughout the Old Testament for the new act of God that would bring deliverance to his people. For Christians this season of expectation also symbolizes the waiting in anticipation for the Second Coming of the Christ when he will return and restore all things (see *The Season of Advent*).

Contrary to advertising campaigns that tout Christmas as beginning with Advent (or Halloween!), the actual

Christmas Season in most Western church traditions begins at sunset on Christmas Eve, December 24, and lasts through January 5. Since this time includes 12 days, the season of Christmas is known in many places as the *Twelve Days of Christmas*. January 6 is usually celebrated as *Epiphany*, although it carries a different significance in various church traditions. Due to different calendars in use in various eras and locations of the church, some cultures and church traditions celebrate Christmas on January 6 (in the older Julian calendar still used as the religious calendar in Eastern Churches, January 6 corresponds to December 24 on our modern calendar).

The origin of Christmas and Epiphany

The origins of the celebrations of Christmas and Epiphany, as well as the dates on which they are observed, are rooted deeply in the history of the early church. There has been much scholarly debate concerning the exact time of the year when Jesus was born, and even in what year he was born- Actually, we do not know either. The best estimate is that Jesus was probably born in the springtime, somewhere between the years of 6 and 4 BC. The lack of a consistent system of timekeeping in the first century, mistakes in later calendars and calculations, and lack of historical details to cross-refer events has led to this imprecision in fixing Jesus' birth. This suggests that the Christmas celebration is not an observance of a historical date, but a commemoration of the event in terms of worship.

As important as Christmas is in our modern religious culture today, the actual celebration of this holiday as

a central part of the church year is a relatively recent phenomenon. Most historians agree that the celebration of Christmas did not begin until about the fourth century, although they are not certain exactly how or why Christmas began as a Christian festival.

The most commonly accepted conclusion is that Christmas originated in Roman culture that celebrated the winter solstice on December 25 (the solstice is the point where the sun's ecliptic, or apparent path in the sky, is at its furthestmost northern and southern point, occurring by our calendar around June 22 and December 22; in the northern hemisphere, we note these days today as the beginning of Summer and Winter). This was a pagan celebration of the birth of the sun (*Natalis Solis Invicti*) as it once again began its annual journey back north from its southernmost point through the heavens. This marked the change of seasons that promised springtime and renewal of the earth. Christians were reluctant to participate in the pagan festivals, yet the cultural and social pressures to participate were enormous. By the early fourth century, Christians began celebrating the birth of Jesus at this time, so it is likely that Christmas was as an alternative to the pagan observance of the winter solstice.

Because of the differences in calendars in use at that time, the Eastern Church celebrated the Incarnation on what is January 6 on our western calendars (although on their calendars this corresponded to December 24), also as an alternative to pagan solstice festivals. Today, most of the Eastern churches (with the exception of

Russian Orthodox) follow the Western practice of celebrating Christmas on December 25. However the Western churches also adopted the January 6 date and used it to observe what is now called *Epiphany*. In effect, the Eastern churches adopted December 25th from the West and the western churches adopted January 6 from the East, and now both are observed in both traditions, although with different emphases.

Christmas traditions

The traditions surrounding the celebration of this season are almost as numerous as the people who celebrate it. Through the years, the holiday has been adapted to local customs, culture, and history and so has produced an amazing variety of Christmas traditions around the world. Some, such as the giving of gifts or the use of a star, arose directly or indirectly out of the biblical nativity stories. Some, such as the legends of Saint Nicholas, have their origin in church history, historical fact that became legendary as it was embellished in story. Others, such as the use of evergreens and the yule log, have pagan origins but were transformed into distinctively Christian traditions. Others, such as the use of a creche or caroling, arose first as local traditions in certain countries or regions that became widely adopted. And still others, such as, reindeer, elves, the North Pole, etc., have largely secular origins and are only loosely associated with the holiday in popular imagination or marketing techniques.

The origin of "Xmas"

The abbreviation of "Xmas" for Christmas, long reviled by many conservative and Low Church Christians, is not nearly as blasphemous as many contend. Rather than a sacrilegious removal of "Christ" from Christmas and replacing him with an unknown, as some claim, the "Xmas" abbreviation has a long history in the church. In Greek, the language in which the New Testament was first written, "chi" (Ϟ or Χ), which is almost identical to the Roman alphabet "X," is the first letter of the word "Christ" (xQurroc;, or as it would be written in older manuscripts, XPIETOZ). In fact, the symbol of the fish in the early church came from using the first letter of several titles used for Jesus (Jesus Christ Son of God Savior) that when combined spelled the Greek word for fish (iϞQvg, *ichthus*).

In the early days of printing when typesetting was done by hand and was very tedious and expensive, abbreviations were common. The church began to use the abbreviation "X" for the word "Christ" in religious publications. From there, the abbreviation moved into general use in newspapers and other publications, and "Xmas" became an accepted way of printing "Christmas."

The biblical nativity narratives

Even though Christmas is the most popular and most celebrated of the Christian Holy Days, it is interesting that it does not play such a central role in the biblical traditions or the Gospel accounts. Nativity narratives are conspicuously absent in both Mark and John who

begin their Gospels with the ministry of John the Baptist, some 30 years after Jesus' birth. This helps explain why John the Baptist and his ministry is usually the focus of one Sunday during Advent (usually the second Sunday). Nativity narratives are only present in Matthew and Luke. But even there, the story is not told as a single narrative in either Gospel, but rather each emphasizes different aspects of what we have come to celebrate as the Christmas story.

Matthew tells the story from the perspective of Joseph, and his deliberations about what he should do with his pregnant wife-to-be. The story unfolds with reassurance from God's messenger that God is at work in this extraordinary circumstance. It is Matthew who introduces the Isaiah quotation from which we get the title Emmanuel for Jesus. However, Matthew gives us no details about the actual birth of Jesus, only a few events leading up to the birth, and then an account of what happened "after Jesus was born."

It is only in Matthew that we learn of the visit of the Magi ("wise men") and the miraculous star in the East that led them to Jesus. It is popular imagination, and perhaps the need to construct a concise story that can fit into a creche (the traditional manger scene), that places the Magi at the Bethlehem stable. It was probably much later, perhaps as much as two years, when they actually visited the Christ child. And it is likewise legend or tradition that assumes three Magi, probably from the fact of three gifts. However, the biblical narrative never says how many Magi came.

Only Matthew recounts God's warning to Joseph, telling him to flee to Egypt with Mary and the child to escape the wrath of Herod. He also tells of the slaughter of the Holy Innocents in Bethlehem as the deranged Herod sought to eliminate any competition for his throne. Matthew also again tells of a messenger from God that directs the Holy Family to settle in Nazareth.

Most of the nativity narrative with which we are most familiar from Christmas plays and public Scripture readings comes from Luke's Gospel. Luke's account is much different than Matthew's. It is told from the perspective of Mary, and her struggle to come to terms with this astonishing event. Luke actually begins his narrative with the miraculous birth of John the Baptist and the disbelief of his father Zechariah. The entire narrative places two women, Elizabeth and Mary, at the center of the story. A messenger of God, in Luke's account named Gabriel, also plays an important role announcing the births of both John and Jesus.

Only Luke incorporates the blessing of Elizabeth on Mary that became part of the "*Hail Mary*" prayer of the Catholic Rosary. Likewise, it is only Luke who tells the nativity narrative through the beautiful songs of Mary (the *Magnificat*), Zechariah (the *Benedictus*), and Simeon (the *Nunc Dimittis*), and the praises of Anna. It is Luke who places the entire story in the context of Roman taxation and tells of the journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It is again largely legend and tradition that has made "no room at the inn" an important feature of the story. This detail and mention of the manger occupies

only a single verse in the story, and is never referred to again in the New Testament beyond Luke 2. From Luke we learn of the visit of the shepherds, and the messengers of God proclaiming Jesus' birth. Again, it is tradition that has the angels singing in the heavens; Luke only tells us that they were "praising God." Finally, Luke tells us of the return of the Holy Family to the temple eight days after Jesus' birth for his official naming and ritual circumcision.

These differences suggest that even though the early church knew many details of Jesus' birth, the Gospel writers were not too concerned with making those details the center of the Gospel story. That should provide us a large caution in considering the role we allow these events to play in the life of the Church. A careful examination of both Matthew and Luke reveals that the differing details they include are not for the purpose of constructing a nativity narrative for its own sake. Rather, they are incorporated into the larger narrative for specific reasons that have to do with the overall theological structure and communication of each Gospel. That does not mean that we must abandon the celebration of Christmas! But at the very least, it should lead us to ask questions of the significance of this season in the cycle of the Christian Church Year.

The meaning of Christmas

What is the true meaning of Christmas? It is a perennial question. It is a question heard often during the Christmas season year after year, from pulpits, TV

personalities, newspaper writers, and just ordinary people bewildered by the hectic pace of the season. It seems a little strange that as popular as this season seems to be, we should continually have to ask that question. The meaning of Christmas seems to be forever in danger of being obscured by all the commotion and promotion of the season. Perhaps we continue to ask the question for fear that the answer will be lost, or already is lost, in the shuffle.

So, the search for the true meaning of Christmas is a recurring one. And yet, too often the answers we provide, even from the church, are more sentimentality, comfortable traditions, or "warm fuzzies" than they are any deep reflection on the significance of the Incarnation for humanity. As much as those things are a part of the season, "Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus" is not the meaning of the season. It is not about the "spirit of giving" or the quest for global peace, or the importance of family, or the beauty of a snow-decorated "silent night."

Certainly we can immediately say that Christmas celebrates the birth of Jesus. But exactly why is that fact so significant beyond the affirmation of a historical fact or a creedal confession? How does, or how should, the meaning of Christmas impact our lives on a daily basis as the people of God?

Perhaps for an answer, we need to return to the biblical narratives, apart from all the traditions that we have heaped around them to make them more entertaining and more coherent to modern ways of thinking. At the

heart of the nativity narratives in both Matthew and Luke, is a simple fact; amid the struggle of a people who had longed for 500 years for God to act in the world in new ways, God came to be with them in a way that totally identified himself with us, as human beings. Amid the most unlikely of circumstances, to the most unlikely of people, God became a human being for the salvation of all people.

I think that the true meaning of Christmas is about possibility. It is not the kind of possibility that comes from a confidence in our own skill, knowledge, ability, or a positive mental attitude. It is possibility that comes solely from the fact that God is God, and that he is the kind of God who comes into our own human existence to reveal himself and call us to himself. It is a possibility that is so surprising at its birth that we are caught unaware, and so are left with wonder at the simplicity of its expression in this infant child. It is a possibility that is easily symbolized by a helpless infant that has nothing of its own by which to survive; but an infant that, because he is Immanuel, God with us, will forever change the world and all humanity. It is this same God who has promised to be with us, with his people, with the church and with us individually, as we live as his people in the world.

It is not just hope, as if it were wishful thinking that things will get better when they cannot. It is hope incarnated into flesh, a hope that can be held in a mother's arms, a hope that expresses a reality that will live beyond

endings and death itself. It is the hope, the possibility, that springs from impossible, and insignificant beginnings, infused with the power of God through the Holy Spirit, that will blossom into a light to the nations.

It is this possibility, this God, that we celebrate at Christmas. And we do so with a confidence born, not of our own desire for it to be so, but from the birth of a child over 2,000 years ago, a child who was the Son of God!

Note:

*The Rosary prayer, aptly named "Hail Mary" from its first words, has a long history in the Catholic tradition. In its present form, it dates to about the 15th century.

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.

Inventing Christmas

Here's one Donald Trump didn't come up with

JAMES V. SCHALL, S.J.

One writer against Christmas went so far as to say that the shopkeepers for their own commercial purposes alone sustain Christmas Day. I am not sure whether he said that the shopkeepers invented Christmas Day. Perhaps he thought that the shopkeepers invented Christianity. It is a quaint picture, the secret conclave between the cheese-monger, the poulterer, and the toy-shop keeper, in order to draw up a theology that shall convert all Europe and Sell some of their goods. Opponents of Christianity would believe anything except Christianity. That the shopkeepers make Christmas is about as conceivable as that the confectioners make children. It is about as sane as that milliners manufacture women. - G. K. Chesterton, *Illustrated London News*, January 13, 1906.

Exactly a century ago this Christmas-tide, Chesterton, with no little amusement, attacked the central heresy about whether the commercial side of Christmas invented this memorable feast, or whether Christmas came first and the commercialism came later, as a kind of prosperous afterthought. The very idea that commercial folks could get together in a backroom to dream up a theology explaining the core idea of Christmas, then proceed to convince the world of its truth, all so that the merchants could make a bundle of money during the otherwise-dull winter solstice, is, on the face of it, absurd.

Shopkeepers did not, in their greed or entrepreneurship, dream up Christmas. Neither did theologians. It is the other way around. Christmas, being what it is, a gift of no merely human origin, is a boon to shopkeepers and a stimulus to theologians. It is closer to the truth to say that Christmas invented shopkeepers and theologians, than it is to say that shopkeepers and theologians manufactured Christianity. Shopkeepers antedated Christianity. In Africa and Asia today, the shopkeepers are most likely to be Hindus or Arabs or Chinese. So shopkeepers did not need Christianity to be shopkeepers. It seems less clear, however, whether theologians could exist without Christmas.

No theologian could invent Christmas from the fervid ponderings of his own mind. Too few in this guild can, to fact, accurately explain what Christmas is about once it was invented not by themselves. Many opponents of Christianity "would believe anything except Christianity." That is, many would do anything but understand what exactly it is that constitutes the precise explication of Christmas.

Some relation does exist between what we understand Christmas to be and how festively we celebrate it, or how inappropriately we celebrate it, or refuse to celebrate it, as the case may be. Christmas customs and traditions should exist in order to explain more profoundly what the feast is about. Too often, however, they obscure what it is about. Unless they were inspired by the truth of the feast and lead back to it, customs can, if we are not careful, lead us away from the heart of Christmas.

An ex-student of mine was in town recently. She, an American, had married a Spaniard, has a daughter. Their family spent some time in Switzerland. She laughed that one year her daughter had three "Christmases" - St. Nicholas Day in Switzerland, Christmas Day in Philadelphia, and the Feast of the Three Kings in Spain. These are all gift-giving and receiving days.

The American Christmas, like its population, is a collection and mixture, even a hodge-podge, of Christmas traditions from all over the world rolled into one. We add our own touches with Bing Crosby's "White Christmas," the ubiquitous and improbable Rudolf, and "All I Want for Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth."

Mexican traditions of the lighted candles in sand bags to guide the Holy Family to our homes are found in the southwest. We all have, brightened with the latest technology, German Christmas trees, when we do not have artificial ones, made in China. Some have the English Yule Logs. Chesterton thought that the modern Christmas mood was largely the invention of Dickens. Santa Claus, though himself from Bari in Italy via a town in Turkey,

has Scandinavian origins. Some reactionary people actually have mangers and cribs. I was once in Oberammergau in Bavaria where they produce wonderful wood carvings of the Nativity scenes sold all over the world.

There are purists who only want such Nativity scenes, no pagan greenery. Likewise, we find and ideologues who want anything but Nativity scenes, especially where anyone can see them. The early Puritans in New England forbade Christmas. There was a time a couple of years ago when greeting someone with a cheery "Merry Christmas" violated your neighbor's constitutional right to your silence. No one wants to be reminded of the day. And we all know the madness of substituting "Holiday" Parties for "Christmas" Parties. I refuse to go to anything called a "Holiday" party during the Christmas season.

School systems seem to have taken the lead in driving out any reference to Christmas, even its name. "Winter" not "Christmas" breaks are in order. We fear not only the idea of Christmas, but the very word "Christmas." I sometimes suspect there is more here than meets the eye. It is not just a question of "imposing" Christmas on others, but the unsettling sense that a joy is connected with this feast that cannot be admitted to exist. If Christmas is not a natural "right" for everyone of whatever persuasion, it must be gradually prohibited as a private privilege for anyone.

At bottom, however, Christmas cannot be held or enjoyed except on its own terms, that is, except on condition of acknowledging what it is that we celebrate.

Christmas not only means that a Child is born unto us, but that, because of this birth, this world is not sufficient to us, not our final home. And Christmas is the feast of the home, both our family home and our eternal home. We live in the first age in the history of the world, aside from Plato's *Republic*, that questions both the proper make-up of a home, with husband, wife, and children, and actually engineers alternatives to it.

We prepare ye...

Roughly, there are two contrary traditions about Christmas and how properly to celebrate it. One is the "expectation" approach, the waiting-for-something-to-happen time of the year, the longing for the real explanation of what we are. This season in the Church is called "Advent." It recalls the long preparation for the coming of Christ that we see in the Old Testament. In the 25th Chapter of Isaiah, we read, "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will provide for all peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines, juicy, rich food and pure, choice wines." These are menus we Christians anticipate for Christmas.

We are to renew its mood and atmosphere in the month before Christmas. Of course, if someone sees no such expectant thing in the Old Testament, then Christmas, as we Christians know it, must seem like an imaginary illusion. Christians hold that solid textual, historical, and theoretical foundations exist for what they maintain about the Birth of Christ in Bethlehem, who He was, where He came from, both His far-reaching origins in a

Jewish family, and in His transcendent origin as the Word now made flesh, the Son of God, to dwell amongst us.

The "anticipation" approach is one of expectation, of a hushness over the world, even of penance. Advent contains a sense both of our unworthiness and of our longings. "*Veni, veni, Emmanuel, Captivum solve Israel...*" Preparations for Christmas begin to be seen in the streets and shops around Thanksgiving time in this country. Even in towns and cities that insist on practicing paganism in their decorations, whose public squares are truly naked, with only lights and greens and tinsel, no creches, no angels singing on high, it is difficult to avoid the impression that, nevertheless, something not yet here is coming in the stillness of the night, in the "Silent Night, Holy Night". Indeed, in areas where the Nativity scenes are still allowed, or in homes and churches that have them, the full Manger Scene, with Joseph, Mary, and the Child, the shepherds, does not appear until Christmas Eve.

However, in most cities, usually a radio station or two are still free to play the well-known and not so well-known Christmas music, from the classic traditions to those of various ethnic origins, even liturgical music. It is not uncommon to find CD's or other forms of recorded music with all of this music performed by finest orchestras and vocalists to be best-sellers. But if one likes bluegrass or country music, these stations specializing in it are sometimes very good in keeping, playing, and indeed composing Christmas music. It may be easier to drive the Christ Child out of the public square than out of the airwaves.

In any case, plans are made, presents bought, cards sent, homes decorated. Students come home, relatives plan to meet. Christmas, as I hinted above, is a season for food and drink, *egg nog*, wassail. Traditions and memories are kept alive simply by the smell of mince-meat pie, or turkey, or popcorn balls, or "chestnuts roasting on an open fire." Reds and greens appear in our garb.

Still behind all of these preparations lies the expectation, the sense of something being given to us, something intended for us but about which we have no control. We are not worthy. It is a gift, not a reward, not something earned. Yet it comes because we sense something lacking to us. We await. No real appreciation of something can exist unless we also wait for it, wait in some awe.

The second tradition is what I might call the "celebration" tradition, the Twelve Days of Christmas, the days from Christmas to the Feast of the Magi, the Three Kings in January, the Feasts of Stephen, the Holy Innocents, Beckett, and good King Wenseslaus in-between, with the rather secular New Year's Day being thrown for good measure. The dating of Christmas does seem to have something to do with supplanting pagan feasts, but also, as Chesterton said, with keeping what is best in the pagan traditions. Like any birthday of any given human being, Christmas, also the birth of one of our kind, cannot be fathomed in one day. Yet its own day, Christmas Day, is the best day. A celebration is what we do when something beyond our powers or sometimes even beyond our comprehension happens to us, something that is addressed to the heart of things, to our very meaning, to our very souls.

Easter will come

Of course, both the anticipation and the celebration are essential to Christmas. Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem because of a "decree that went out from Caesar Augustus." How remarkable in the Gospel of Luke is this "coincidence," this linking of the first Roman emperor with the birth of the Son of Man in a manger, in that particular place at the origins of the House of David. But few knew of this event when it happened. Though angels were singing on high, it was a whole before a couple of Roman historians even hinted at it. Christmas is not a feast of great events in this world. Rather it is a feast that reminds that great things take place in small towns, in out-of-the-way places, things that need time to grow, to flourish.

Rush Limbaugh one day talked of a book called *The War Against Christinas*. No doubt there is such a war. Christmas seems to bring out in some a certain kind of venom that strikes us Christians as bordering on the diabolical. "Why is this most tender of feasts subject to such resentment?" we wonder to ourselves. In these days of an often-intolerant tolerance, we hesitate to speculate. We know of the words spoken of this Child born amongst Qs that many would rise and fall because of Him. A sword would pierce the heart of His mother. He could not be ignored, even if rejected, perhaps especially if rejected. Such things go against the mood of our age, yet are more true in our age than ever before.

In the Breviary for Christmas Eve, we find a sermon of the great Augustine. "Awake, mankind!" he tells us.

"For your sake God has become man.... I tell you again: for your sake, God became man." Is this the clue we need? "You would have suffered eternal death, had he not been born in time. Never would you have been freed from sinful flesh, had he not taken on himself the likeness of sinful flesh." We do not like to be reminded of our sinfulness. We do not like to know what is wrong so that we are left free to do what we will.

On Christmas Eve, our redemption is at hand. But it does not work itself out as we might like, as we would have done it if we were in charge. The shadow of the Cross hovers over the Manger. But what happens is for "our sake." We are to be "awake," almost as if it is possible for us to miss the most momentous thing that has happened to our kind. We can, indeed, choose not to see.

About Christmas an incredible concreteness is found. Little things must be done for ordinary people, by ordinary people, ourselves included. John says in his first letter, "This is what we proclaim to you, what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched - we speak of the word of life...." Shopkeepers did not invent Christmas. Neither did the theologians.

What we most associate Christmas with is a gift. A gift is not something we can demand, not something that is due to us. Ultimately, the structure of the universe is first to be understood as a gift. Who made Christmas?

"The Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us." It has never been put more succinctly. We can choose other explanations and no doubt we do. All gifts must be freely received by those to whom they are freely given. This is the principle upon which the universe *m.* constructed.

The True Meaning of Christmas

SHANGHAI STAR (2002-12-19) ~"

"Hello little boy, have you been good this year?" says a man with a fake beard and a pillow shoved up his shirt.

"Yes Santa", the starry-eyed child replies before asking for a Sega Dreamcast.

Despite having seen several different men wearing fake beards, otherwise intelligent children seem to want to believe in Santa. St. Nick's apparent pluralism is easily accepted; there are, of course, many "Santa's helpers",

Nonetheless, Santa is one of those convenient lies everyone benefits from and, therefore, upholds. Kids get more presents in return for good behavior. Well, at least in the run-up to Christmas.

Seeing as this bogus figure is central to the modern concept, it is little wonder that factions clash on what the "true meaning" of Christmas really is.

On the one hand you have the Christian world, which laments the spiritual death of Christmas at the hands of commercialism. Without Christ, they say, there is no Christmas. Yet the world is trying hard to prove them wrong. Shanghai serves as a good example; Christmas will be celebrated despite a total lack of any innate spiritual base.

On the other hand, there are the staunch atheists who refuse to acknowledge Christmas at all. They don't believe in any God, let alone the human child of one. Perhaps there are also other things we can refuse to acknowledge. Perhaps my editor will accept the excuse of the Norse-god Thor not existing, as a reason for not turning up to work on Thursdays.

Not forgetting the, "Well, it's just a bit of fun really" crowd, who, in truth, are commerce's fodder, there are those who believe it's just a good excuse to get together with people you don't usually see.

Finally, among an abundance of other factions, some people simply don't care.

So in looking at the modern-day state of Christmas, we find little hope of finding an answer to the "true meaning" question. It is possible, as with most muddles in the world, that the answer lies in history.

December 25 happens to be the winter solstice. It is a day that has been celebrated by everybody from the Romans, to Persians, to Vikings, Saxons and Mesopotamians. Then in AD 350, Julius I, Bishop of Rome,

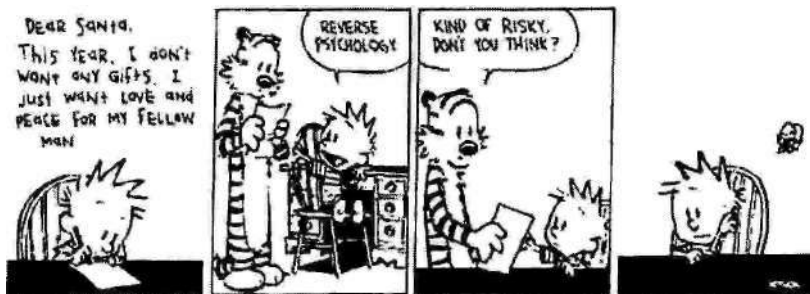
chose December 25 as the observance of Clirist's birth, so as to compete with its religious competitors.

This phenomenon is not confined to Christmas. The eighth century English scholar, St. Bede, suggested that the word Easter originated from the Anglo-Saxon word "Eostre": the Teutonic Goddess of spring and fertility, to whom April was dedicated. Easter Rabbits (fertility), and brightly painted eggs given as gifts, are both traditions rooted in her celebration.

Thus winter solstice has always served the main spiritual guidance of the day. People shouldn't be surprised then, that today it's a commercial affair.

Yet there is more to this harshly logical ending than meets the eye. If you do want to find God in Christmas, you will, and if you don't, you won't. Mankind's history has shown that people will celebrate their own beliefs, and define their own spirituality.

Maybe a day where everyone can celebrate their different beliefs at the same time, and in fact, celebrate that very difference, is just what this world needs right now.



If you do want to find God in Christmas, you will, and if you don't, you won't. Mankind's history has shown that people will celebrate their own beliefs, and define their own spirituality.

The Scrooge Before Christmas Crying Out for Breath Amidst the Tinsel

ALAN HARRIS

YES, THERE IS A SCROOGE. He haunts the hearts of those who wish that Santa's \$10.00 white beard were real - who wish that his "Ho, ho, ho" meant more than the \$6.00 an hour he is paid to utter it. Scrooge-inhabited people desperately long for a "Ho, ho, ho" from deep within a genuine person *s heart.

We seem to want people, all people, to be genuine, yet most people have personality owies that deflect them away from thoroughly genuine behavior. Christmas would ideally be a time when all of those would get better, but through some quirk of human nature, they usually get worse. The showy get showier, the stingy get stingier, the drinkers get drunker, the overeaters get more overweight, and the busy get busier.

Considering the above, "Christmas" would seem a mockery when we consider that two-thirds of the word is "Christ". Perhaps those of Scroogish persuasion would prefer to spell it "Christmess".

Scroogish people are not the only ones who clamor for change* Certain religious types are annually haranguing each other about the True Meaning of Christmas. These frustrated (and sometimes ultraholy) people don't usually identify at all with Scrooge, but they, too, hate the tinsel, the tawdriness, and (other people's) hypocrisy. They want everyone to concentrate on the Christ child, the angels, the star, and other symbols which provided comfortable myths and icons to live by during their childhood. They tend to cling to these warm, fuzzy concepts the more tightly as they find themselves struggling with the bottomless mysteries of relationships, emotions, illnesses, and the Big Unmentionable. These bewildered adults cry out for something more stable, something safer, something holier, and something that makes sense when life doesn't.

Scroogeness could be defined as a thin layer of rage masking a desperate search for sincerity beneath. The Scrooge in Our hearts knows the difference between the Jesus and the junk. Scrooge is the skeptic who dares to call tinsel tinsel, the seemingly cruel man who eschews sentimentality. Scrooge dares to drill down deeper than the reindeer manure, down into his past hurts and heartaches, down to the deepest gnarled roots that tap into his tortured soul. No, he does not like Christmas, nor does he especially like himself, but in

digging deeply, he discovers a little child in there who can scarcely breathe. He sees that the "Bah" in "Bali, humbug" has all along been a crying out for breath and life and truth and goodness. Humbug has been smothering this little child for most of its life.

Long live the Scrooge within us, for deep within this Scrooge is the holy child who began life in a stable full of smelly stuff, and in whose innocent heart shimmers a true light which will dissolve the false lights and shams.

The Christ, then, may be said to inhabit Scrooge and you and me. Even though our whole land be filled with tinsel, Scrooge and you and I may discover that tinsel is an improvement over the smelly stuff in the stable. And through this child's eyes we may even see a light which we might call, for lack of a better word, a star,

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A Marian Christmas Reflection

APOLONIO LATAR III

The human person stands in the midst of mystery. Everything around him remains ultimately unsolvable. He looks for answers but falls short because of his limitations. He tries to look for answers about how the world is the way it is; how the stars twinkle at night; what makes a tree a tree; why there is evil and suffering in the world. He tries to understand each person he meets, and most of all, himself who is the closest to him and who is mysteriously the hardest to understand. Though he falls short in understanding, he remains longing for truth. He does not cease to ascend to truth; he tries to overcome the obstacles he faces, to exceed his faculties and limitations. Yet, with all of his searches, he still falls short in looking for that profound thing which seems to be Worth looking for.

A young girl 2,000 years ago was faced with a mystery. She was greeted by an angel: "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you" (Luke 1:28). "She was greatly

troubled at what was said" and the mystery became more mysterious: "Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will rule over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:31-33). How can a virgin have a child? How can Yahweh have a Son? And of all people, why Mary? The angel explained that the Holy Spirit will overshadow her and she responded: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord, May it be done to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

In the face of mystery, the Virgin submitted to God's Word. She did not try to rationalize what had been said to her. She was silent. When we are faced with a mystery, such as the mystery of suffering, we tend to be troubled like the Virgin. Yet, we have to know our place. We are in God's story. We are in God's palms. It is Providence that rules our lives. And when we abandon ourselves to Divine Providence, we get a better understanding of the purpose in our lives. Mary knew that everything was in God's hands. And because She knew that her whole life rested in God's arms, she did nothing else than obey. Because of that, she was given the gift to hold God in her arms.

A liturgical Christmas

The Annunciation should be read in a Liturgical context. At first, we see the Angel pronouncing God's

Word to her. She listened. Then, the Angel told her that she will receive God Himself. She submitted. She gave her "Amen" as we do when we receive communion. We then read her Magnificat, her thanksgiving. The Annunciation is truly a Eucharistic event. Like the Annunciation, let us focus on God's Word and His Incarnation this Christmas. We must remember that whenever we go to Mass, we receive Christ Himself in the Eucharist, a continuation of the Incarnation. Like Mary, let us receive Him in silence and in reverence.

Fear!

We read in the Magnificat: "His mercy is from age to age to those who fear him." In an age where fornication, homosexuality, abortion, and embryonic stem cells research is being accepted, it is the obligation of Christians to ask for forgiveness. And to ask for forgiveness, to receive the mercy of God, we must fear Him. We must give the fear He deserves. In the words of our Holy Father John Paul II:

"In order to set contemporary man free from fear of himself, of the world, of others, of earthly powers, of oppressive systems, in order to set him free from every manifestation of a servile fear before that "prevailing force" which believers call God, it is necessary to pray fervently that he will bear and cultivate in his heart that true fear of God, which is the beginning of wisdom."



In the face of mystery, the Virgin submitted to God's Word. She did not try to rationalize what had been said to her, She was silent. When we are faced with a mystery, such as the mystery of suffering, we tend to be troubled like the Virgin. Yet, we liave to know our place. We are in God's story. We are in God's palms. It is Providence that rules our lives.

DOCUMENTATION

A Pastoral Exhortation on Charter Change and the Common Good

CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF THE PHILIPPINES

From the moral standpoint, we, your Bishops, continue to express our concern over the kind of democracy that we are practicing, whether this leads us to attain the common good. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* states:

"The Church values the democratic system inasmuch as it ensures the participation of the citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate." (*Centessimus Annus*, #46)

Charter Change, changing our Constitution, is such a serious matter for the entire country, because it will determine the future of our people. Thus we must make

the widest consultation on it for adequate information, discussion and education. That is why we disagree with the so-called "people's initiative" which appeared only as a "signature campaign" without focus on the real intention. The CBCP subscribes to the allegation that the "people's initiative" is an initiative of the ruling power, and not genuinely of the people. From the moral standpoint, it is clothed with suspicion. And so we ask: is it really for the people and the common good? We leave to our well-informed lawyers the legal arguments.

Holding a Constitutional Convention will be very expensive, as it will cost several billion pesos. But it is worth spending that much for something that is good for the greatest number. A Constitutional Convention will be a better political exercise than convening congressmen as a Constituent Assembly which is something that can easily become self-serving. The government has spent enormously to cheating and graft and corruption.

We may be spending or losing much more than that through government overspending and cheating and graft and corruption, which are very difficult to assess and account for. If it is worth several billion pesos, it is worth spending in an honest way. A Constitutional Convention will be a better political exercise than the present powers-that-be, our Congress, making themselves a Constituent Assembly that can easily become self-serving.

It is said that the presidential form of government is a source of corruption among other things. We should ask a different question: Is it the presidential form that is

the source of corruption, or the people in authority who corrupt and abuse the system? Any form of government will have its positive and negative characteristics; but the people who run the government are very crucial; they can either corrupt it or make it serve the common good. Any system or form of government in the hands of honest, just and incorruptible people will be a source of good for the governed. Will the parliamentary-unicameral form of government not be corrupted by the people who will create it?

It is in this light that we have made our position clear on Charter Change from the moral standpoint, and we reiterate it:

"Changing the Constitution, involving major shifts in the form of government, requires widespread participation, total transparency and relative serenity that allows for rational discussion and debate. This is best done through a Constitutional Convention." (*CBCP, January 2006*)

Heeding the exhortation of Pope Benedict XVI in *Deus Caritas Est* that the Church "is called to contribute to the purification of reason" (# 29), we would like to ask these and similar questions to guide the discussion, discernment and debate on the charter change. Are you convinced that the Charter Change as presently presented by our governing politicians is really for the common good? Are you convinced that the "people's initiative" is genuinely the people's activity, and has its real source in the people? Do you want our legislators to convert

themselves into a Constituent Assembly where *they alone* will rewrite our Constitution, and have it only approved by us in a plebiscite? Is it enough to say YES to Charter Change?

We are in a democracy. Should not then the citizenry be made to participate by electing their delegates to a Constitutional Convention?

These are the questions we would like our people in our dioceses and parishes to participate in answering regarding so serious a matter as Charter Change.

For the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines.

tANGEL N, LAGDAMEO, D.D.
Archbishop of Jaro
President, CBCP
September 14, 2006

Living the Paschal Mystery

fGAUDENCIO B. CARDINAL ROSALES, DD

Brothers in the priesthood and sisters in the faith:

We now come to the most difficult part of our apostolic vision. As we will soon see there are two moments in our vision, both difficult, with regard to the Paschal Mystery. The first difficulty is in understanding the real meaning of this Passing-over Mystery.

And the second is, after getting a hint of what it is, how do we understand it? We have been quoting it again and again, but we do not understand.

Suffering as a means

Questions may be asked: "Why is there so much suffering around? Why is there so much suffering in the

*Homily delivered by His Eminence Gaudencio B. Cardinal Rosales, Archbishop of Manila, during the Mass celebrating the Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary into heaven on August 15, 2006, at the Arzobispado Chapel.

world? Why is there so much suffering in the Philippines? Why do we suffer?" There is not a priest or layperson around who has never suffered, who has never been tried, who has never failed. The truth is in life there are so many why's, *bakit, nano*. But unless experienced, that "why" cannot make you wise. You've got to experience it!

Concretely put, the only way to overcome suffering and convert it to growth is to experience the suffering. There are no painkillers, no anesthesia, and you find out *drat* anything that does not belong to God is foolishness in trying to address this mystery of suffering. There is a saying that it is the roughness of the grindstone that sharpens the blade of the sword; it is the storm that hardens the oak tree or the acacia; and it is work that develops the muscles.

The key to one's understanding of the Paschal Mystery are the Hebrew words "*pasah*", "*pasehu*", "*paseh*". There are, I think, 34 explanations of this in some commentaries and all of them are mediated by blood. But let's take "*pasah*." What does it mean in Hebrew? It means to pass over, to skip. To go across. This refers to the Avenging Lord in Exodus who skipped over or passed over the houses of Israelites and spared the Israelite households upon seeing the blood of the lamb painted on the doorposts of their homes (*Exodus 12:13*). But aside from referring to the refuge afforded by the lamb's blood, skipping slavery to cross to the other side of freedom is possible only through the death of the lamb. It involves death. It is not then possible to cross to new life and

therefore to freedom, without having to pass from suffering and ultimately death.

The Paschal experience always goes through three phases, whether it is in spiritual life, political life, cultural life, even botanical life.

Slavery	-	Suffering	-	Freedom
Sin	•»•	Conversion	-*	New Life
Cross	-	Death	^	Resurrection
Vice	-	Self-control	-	Virtue
Liberty	—	Discipline	™	Character

Even if you're free if you don't discipline yourself, you're a slave. You are not going to develop character. As pastors and teachers we have to tell people of this and not just put on the superfieials, changing facades. No way! The way of Jesus is to change the person. Pass through: passion, cross and death, resurrection. Those are the three main things in salvation, liberation, development, etc. **Suffering, death, resurrection.**

**The Pasch in the Old Testament and
Jesus Christ as Pasch in the New Testament**

We are all experiencing crossing overs. But some people miss it and it doesn't make any sense.

In the passing-over experience, there always is the element of restriction (you cannot cross): conflict, difficulty, or crisis. In Exodus, the phase of conflict was the chosen people's slavery in Egypt. All the sufferings, all

the oppression and injustice and the inhumanity in the history of man are parts of the slavery portion of experience and life awaiting discovery and release towards its only potential, which is development, freedom and salvation. We're moving that way, ultimately into salvation, but before that, development, freedom.

The second phase of the actual escape of the Israelites was the death of the entire first-born of men and beasts alike. We were crossing to the most difficult. It must always be mediated by blood. So in the second phase there is now death but that death was signaled by the lamb's blood. The lamb that Yahweh said must be slain. The sacrificed lamb was the sign of the night's upcoming freedom. And the lamb's meat was their "food", actually their "viaticum" in that nocturnal flight to freedom. That night escape of the fleeing Israelites led them to safety. But there must be death of their enslavement; death of their fear that brings them to the better side of life.

So you see, we cannot cross to the other side without passing through death - what they call vicarial dying, which is nothing but practicing for the final death that brings us to eternal life. AH these things are practices and these things are leading us to that fullness of life that we are talking about.

And the third phase, the last, is without doubt, the freedom across the Sea of Reeds, the other side, a new life. The life of the free!

Again and again our lord Jesus Christ foretold his own destined glory, but always passing through three inescapable phases when he himself said, "The Son of man is going to be delivered into the power of men; they will put him to death, and on the third day he will rise up again." (Matthew 16:22) You see the three stages: delivered to the powers of evil men; put to death; and rising on the third day. The phases are unmistakable in human experience.

Suffering, death, and resurrection

The way of passing over from slavery to freedom, sin to new life, vice to virtue; passing over from poverty to riches (which we are trying to address now - poverty to sufficiency), from sickness to health, or even underdevelopment to progress, are always mediated by blood or its equivalent. What is the equivalent of blood? Sacrifice, discipline, abnegation, and self-control. All these are painful. And we miss the whole thing. Now we see in our new vision, all these things will matter. They will open the eyes of our citizens and our brother priests again to the necessity of pain - the blood - sacrifice, discipline, abnegation, control.

It has been said that the noblest souls are the most tempted. The devil assaults the finest minds and the noblest spirits (J.L. Lawrence). If you're not tempted, you're not noble. You've got to be tried. You've got to struggle. If one's target is success or if the desired object is human and spiritual advancement, then he or

she must expect trials and affliction. This is what we share with the people in the Archdiocese. It is part of our vision, a vision of the Church and the vision of the community. And I am telling this to you so that you will share it with others. We know where we're going but there is a caution - and we are all going to be tempted - and it comes from St. Peter. He said "Keep sober and alert because your enemy, the devil, is on the prowl like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (*1 Peter* 5:8). We are always the targets because we're headed for something noble, that fullness of life that only comes from Jesus Christ* our brother and our teacher.

THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTION to this developmental or liberation process: SACRIFICE - DEATH - NEW LIFE.

No exception to **SACRIFICE**. No exception to the experience of **DEATH** in the vicarial sense. No exception to **NEW LIFE**. Those three must go together. And if you have not gone through it you're less a man and less a woman.

This most important Paschal Mystery Experience called a passing-over event has already been enunciated as a "must law" for all created life. **A must law.**

In a book about Teilhard de Chardin, he said something like, even if man had not committed sin, and woman, still they have to suffer. Quite striking. When we say that it's a "must law" for all created life, anyone who is created must suffer. Even Jesus. He had no sin

but he took the risk out of love for us to become human. That humanity of Christ is created. The divinity of Christ is not created, therefore, Jesus, in order to cross, must suffer.

When Jesus was foretelling his death he said, "Now the hour has come for the Son of man to be glorified. In truth I tell you, *unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies it remains only a simple grain, but if it dies it yields a rich harvest.*" (John 12:24) See! You begin to understand differently. The man, a mystic scientist like Chardin. You want to grow? Die.

The Mystery of the Passover tells us that there is no glory except only through the necessary passing through passion and death. For the seed or the grain to produce new shoots and fruits it has to fall to the ground. Why? In order to die. Why? To continue to germinate new life, and then give the promised new fruit. Dying is the key to more life. Let me repeat that. **Dying is the key to more life.** Dying of course in the usual way is to shed blood but could instead be abnegation, control, sacrifice. You don't have to shed blood. No! The blood, the pain takes place inside. Dying is the key to more life. **Sacrifice and discipline provide the passage to better, freer new life and character.**

Unfortunately we, my brother priests, have stopped talking about this. How soon we forget all this! No one comes to progress and success without sacrifice.

There is no glory without the cross.

No Good Friday, no Easter Sunday.

No pain, no gain!

How soon and how we always forget that restraint, discipline are necessary phases to progress, whether that progress is spiritual, material, industrial, social, political, or cultural, *hindi maaaring hindi dito dadaan* or all is deceit. Worse still is we cheat! We cheat in the process. We invent make-believe pass-overs or adventures, a death without pain, no sacrifice, no discipline, no renewal, and then pretend to enjoy a glory bereft of meaning and without virtue. Absolutely without virtue. Will we be able to cross? Or shall we make short-cuts and deceits every time, every five or seven years?

The Paschal Mystery within the perspective of our apostolic vision in the Archdiocese of Manila

The Vision states that we are called to become a community of people with fullness of life and witnessing to the Kingdom of God while living the Paschal Mystery. The vision does not only state that while living the pass-over mystery, fullness of life is being achieved. Our understanding of the Paschal Mystery as self-discipline, sacrifice, conversion, as suffering and death to one's self, serve as the necessary means to achieve new life, virtue, character, and ultimately the equivalent of fullness of life in our vision. These are all means.

In the same manner our enjoying of life in the dominance of God as Father (Kingdom of God) in our life, our community and Church is assured only by the only process chosen and appointed by Jesus Christ - His Paschal Mystery (or our passing - over experience). Other than the mystery called the Pasch, there is no other way of proceeding to our human development or even eternal salvation.

Jesus is our Paschal Mystery. He said, "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life." There is only one way proceeding towards development of the human person, society or country and it is the way of discipline, sacrifice, control of self and endless taming of one's greed. No matter how one looks at the process there is always the "death" part in the process. And I put "death" in quotation marks.

All of these are equivalent to what we now accept in Jesus as our PASCHAL MYSTERY or our crossing-over experience with all its pain, "death" and the rewarding moments of new life, freedom. All of them are achievable through and in Jesus Christ, his saving experience and our own struggles for the fullness we call the **more**, leading us towards the **most** in life.

Ask the Good Lord that we will have this. It is a process. Our Blessed Mother lived all these things. May Jesus through the intercession of Mary, our Mother, bless us.

We want our Church to move on, if we love our country, let's start to live this mystery we've talked about. It will bring us to the understanding of the power and the glory of Jesus and his greater generosity to share with us, really, FULLNESS OF LIFE.



God's Hope for Humanity

HON. ARTEMIO V. PANGANIBAN

Chief Justice of the Philippines

In our Catholic world, the family, no doubt, plays a pivotal role; its influence is all-pervasive. To an individual, the family is the most important reference group and the core of a person's alliance system. It is where one finds security, strength, and support. Christian society accords high priority to loyalty to family and kin, family solidarity and togetherness, as well as concern for family welfare and honor.

In tile Philippines, our Constitution, laws and jurisprudence have been traditionally protective of marriage, and of the family as the basic unit of our society. It is thus my purpose to discuss how our Constitution, laws and jurisprudence govern, affect and protect marriage and the family.

Speech delivered by Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban during the 13 Human Life International Asia Pacific Congress on Faith, Life and Family, held on October 8. 2006, at the Parklane International Hotel in Cebu City.

Constitutional provisions on marriage and the family

At the outset, let me cite briefly important mandates of our fundamental law on marriage and the family.

Our Constitution commands the State to protect marriage as an inviolable social institution and the foundation of the family.¹ As a policy, it requires the State to recognize the sanctity of family life. Accordingly, it directs (1) the State to protect and strengthen the family as a basic autonomous social institution; and (2) the government to support the natural and primary right and duty of parents in the rearing of the youth for civic efficiency and the development of moral character.² Thus, the State "shall equally protect the life of the mother and the life of the unborn from conception."³ Notice that the protection is from conception, not from birth; that is why abortion is outlawed in our country.

The State policy of protecting and strengthening the family has been given meaning and substance through Article XV. Under this provision, the State is required to recognize the Filipino family as the foundation of the nation. Accordingly, the State shall strengthen and actively promote the solidarity and total development of the family.⁴

The Constitution upholds the right of the spouses to rear a family in accordance with their religious conviction

¹ CONSTITUTION, Art. XV, Sec. 2.

² *Id.*, Art. H, Sec. 12.

³ *Id.*

⁴ Art. XV, Sec. 1.

and the demands of responsible parenthood. Moreover, it provides for (1) the right of children to assistance - including proper care and nutrition - and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, and other conditions prejudicial to their development; (2) the right of the family to a family living wage and income; and (3) the right of families or family associations to participate in the planning and implementation of policies and programs that affect them.⁶ It even enjoins the family and the State to care for their elderly members.⁷

Working women are protected by provisions for safe and healthful working conditions that take into account their maternal functions. They are also provided with facilities and opportunities that could enhance their welfare and enable them to realize their full potential in the service of the nation.⁸

Family Code provisions

The Constitutional mandates on marriage and the family are elucidated in the Family Code of the Philippines.⁹ The Code defines marriage as follows:

"Marriage is a special contract of permanent union between a man and a woman, entered into in accordance with law for the establishment of

⁵ Article XV, Section 3(1).

⁶ Id., Sees. 3(2), 3, 4.

⁷ Id., Sec. 4.

⁸ An. Xn, Sec. 14.

⁹ Executive Order No. 209.ⁱ

conjugal and family life. It is the foundation of the family and an inviolable social institution whose nature, consequences and incidents, are governed by law and are not subject to stipulation XXX." ¹⁰

Early on, family relations were governed primarily by the Civil Code of the Philippines.¹¹ Since August 3, 1988,¹² however, its provisions on marriage and family relations were supplanted by the Family Code to make them more relevant to Filipino customs, values, ideals and current trends in Philippine society. Our Muslim brethren, on the other hand, are covered by the special provisions of the Muslim Code of Personal Laws.

The inviolability of marriage is the basis for prohibiting divorce in our jurisdiction. Thus, only legal separation is recognized in the Philippines. Even in cases in which legal separation is allowed, the law decrees that courts must first take steps towards reconciling the spouses. Before tackling the issue of separation, the courts must be fully satisfied that reconciliation is highly improbable.¹³

Article 149 of the Family Code recognizes the family as the foundation of the nation; and as a basic social

¹⁰ THE FAMILY CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES, Art. 1.

¹¹ Republic Act No. 386.

¹² Although passed on July 6, 1987, the Code, as provided under Article 256, took effect one year after the completion of its publication in a newspaper of general circulation.

¹³ Id., Art. 59.

institution that public policy cherishes and protects. Consequently, family relations are governed by law; no customs, practice or agreement destructive of the family shall be recognized or given effect.

Preservation of family harmony as a legal policy is also evident in Article 151 of the Code. This Article provides that no suit between members of the same family shall prosper unless the verified complaint or petition shows that earnest efforts towards a compromise have first been made, but have failed. Without these efforts, the case must be dismissed. This rule, however, will not apply to cases that may not be the subject of compromise.⁴

Another measure that protects the family from being torn apart by homelessness is the establishment of a family home. Under the current provisions, the family home is deemed constituted from the time it is occupied as a family residence and it shall continue as such for as long as any of its beneficiaries actually resides there.¹⁵ In addition, it shall be exempt from foreclosure, forced

¹⁴ Under Article 2035 of the Civil Code, the following cases may not be the subject of compromise:

- 1) The civil status of persons
- 2) The validity of a marriage or a legal separation
- 3) Any ground for legal separation
- 4) Future support
- 5) The jurisdiction of courts
- 6) Future legitime

¹⁵ FAMILY CODE, Arts. 152, 153 and 154. Under Philippine tax law, the decedent's family home is specifically exempted from estate tax. Furthermore, heads of the family are allowed deductions and personal exemptions for dependents.

sale, or attachment, except when the Family Code provides otherwise.¹⁶

Significant changes were further introduced by the Code. Thus, (1) the husband and wife now jointly decide where the family domicile will be established,¹⁷ and they are jointly responsible for the support and management of the family and household;¹⁸ (2) the administration and enjoyment of the communal or the conjugal partnership property belong to both spouses jointly,¹⁹ so that any disposition of a conjugal property by the husband as administrator is void without the written consent of the wife in appropriate cases; and (3) both spouses jointly exercise legal guardianship over the property of their unemancipated common children.®

Other laws that protect the family

Still other laws deal with certain aspects of the family and family relations. The Child and Youth Welfare Code

¹⁶ Under Article 155 of the Family Code, the family home shall be exempt from execution, forced sale or attachment except:

- "1) For non-payment of taxes;
- "2) For debts incurred prior to the constitution of the family home;
- "3) For debts secured by mortgages on the premises before or after such constitution; and
- "4) For debts due to laborers, mechanics, architects, builders, materialmen and others who have rendered service or furnished material for the construction of the building."

¹⁷ FAMILY CODE, Sec. 69.

¹⁸ *id.*, Arts, *imi*,

¹⁹ *Id.*, Arts. 96 and 124.

²⁰ *Id.*, Art. 225.

(Presidential Decree No. 603, as amended), for instance, gives special emphasis on children by providing a basic framework for their development and protection. It defines the rights and the responsibilities of children; as well as the responsibilities of the family, community, *samahan* (association), school, church and the State in ensuring the proper development of children. It likewise presents administrative measures and programs for the care and treatment of special children; namely, those who have been abandoned, neglected, dependent, working, physically disabled and emotionally disturbed children, as well as youth offenders.

Measures to protect children are further provided in Republic Act No. 7610, which provides for stronger deterrence and special protection against child abuse, exploitation and discrimination. This law was amended by Republic Act No. 7658 to enforce the policy against child labor.

In the rule on evidence, the family is treated as an enclosure for security and spontaneity in communication; thus, one spouse cannot be compelled to testify against the other in criminal proceedings. Philippine labor laws also provide family support systems, such as social security, disability benefits, paternity and maternity leaves; and assistance to families that care for their dependants.

Even our Local Government Code, Republic Act No. 7160 (1991), gives premium to the Filipino family. It mandates the implementation of family and community welfare and development¹ services by the local government

units under the guidance of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD).²¹

Supreme Court decisions on psychological incapacity

In line with the constitutional policy of preserving the family, the Supreme Court has tackled various family issues. Allow me to relate to you some of these cases.

As you may know, the Family Code has introduced an entirely new ground (in addition to those enumerated in the Civil Code) to assail the validity of a marriage: "psychological incapacity." Since the effectivity of the Family Code, our courts have been swamped with petitions to declare marriages void based on this ground. To avoid precipitate and indiscriminate declarations of the nullity of marriages, the Supreme Court had to examine and evaluate more carefully and minutely every circumstance that might have some bearing on the degree, extent, and other conditions of psychological incapacity.

Under the law, the DSWD retains these functions:

- a) Formulation of programs, policies, rules, regulations and standards relative to the implementation of family and community welfare and development services;
- b) Initiation and administration of pilot or special projects for demonstration of the corresponding policies, programs, services, strategies, methods, procedures and guidelines prior to nationwide implementation; and
- c) Evaluation, and provision of technical assistance and consultative services to operating units and local government welfare departments on program implementation.

To clarify, I must point out that petitions for the declaration of nullity of a marriage pertain to cases in which there is no marriage to speak of in the first place, because of a fatal defect existing at the time it was celebrated. Thus, a nullity is not equivalent to a divorce, which cuts the bonds of a previously valid marriage. Before Church Law, the validity of marriage may be contested with a plea of nullity, never with an action for annulment. The distinction is well-known and rather clear: a marriage decision in favor of nullity is merely a declaration that the union has been void from its very start on account of either lack or deficiency of canonical form, the presence of an impediment, and/or a defect in matrimonial consent.

According to Church doctrine, a marriage is either valid or void - never valid, yet voidable. Before Civil law, however, a marriage may be valid, void or voidable. Hence, Civil Courts render not only decisions of "nullity," but also judgments of "annulment," whereby a valid but voidable marriage is annulled.²²

In *Santos v. Court of Appeals*,²³ the Court interpreted psychological incapacity as "no less than a mental (not physical) incapacity that causes a party to be truly incognitive of the basic marital covenants that concomitantly must be assumed and discharged by the parties to the marriage x x x." Many judges and lawyers, however, found it difficult to apply the novel definition in specific cases.

²² ARCHBISHOP OSCAR V. CRUZ, IMPEDIMENTS TO CANONICAL MARRIAGE, 196 (2002).

²³ 240 SCRA 20, January 4, 1995, per Vitug, I.

Thus, the Court had to explain more clearly the nullity of the marriage of Reynaldo and Roridel Molina in *Republic v. Molina*.²⁴ Branding Article 36 as the "most liberal divorce procedure in the world," the Office of the Solicitor General (OSG) had asked the Supreme Court not only to decide the dispute between the spouses, but also to issue guidelines for determining when psychological incapacity may be used to nullify a marriage.

Thus, the real significance of this Decision, which I was privileged to write on behalf of the High Court, was not in its refusal to declare the Molina marriage void, but in its formulation of rules for the evaluation of similar cases. Indeed, among the functions of the Supreme Court is to teach and to open new vistas. To guide the bench, the bar and the public in interpreting and applying "psychological incapacity" as a ground for declaring marriages void, the Court thus issued several guidelines, as follows:

- "1) **The burden of proof to show the nullity of the marriage belongs to the plaintiff.** Any doubt should be resolved in favor of the existence and continuation of the marriage and against its dissolution and nullity, x x x.
- "2) **The *root cause* of the psychological incapacity must be: (a) medically or clinically identified, (b) alleged in the complaint, (c) sufficiently proven by experts and (d) clearly explained in the decision.** Article 36 of the Family Code requires that the incapacity must be psychological

- not physical, although its manifestations and/or symptoms may be physical. The evidence must convince the court that the parties, or one of them, was mentally or psychically ill to such an extent that the person could not have known the obligations he was assuming, or knowing them, could not have given valid assumption thereof, x x x.
- "3) **The incapacity must be proven to be existing at 'the time of the celebration' of the marriage.** The evidence must show that the illness was existing when the parties exchanged their T do's.'
xxx.
- *4} **Such incapacity must also be shown to be medically or clinically permanent or *incurable*.** Such incurability may be absolute or even relative only in regard to the other spouse, not necessarily absolutely against everyone of the same sex. Furthermore, such incapacity must be relevant to the assumption of marriage obligations x x x.
- "5) **Such illness must be *grave* enough to bring about the disability of the party to assume the essential obligations of marriage.** Thus, 'mild characteriological peculiarities, mood changes, occasional emotional outbursts cannot be accepted as *root* causes. The illness must **be** shown as downright incapacity or inability, not a refusal, neglect or difficulty, much less ill will, x x x.
- "6) **The essential marital obligations must be those embraced by Articles 68 up to 71 of the Family Code as regards the husband and wife as well as Articles 220, 221 and 225 of the same**

Code in regard to parents and their children. Such non-compliance with marital obligation(s) must also be stated in the petition, proven by evidence and included in the text of the decision.

"7) Interpretations given by the National Appellate Matrimonial Tribunal of the Catholic Church in the Philippines, while not controlling or decisive, should be given great respect by our courts, x x x

"8) The trial court must order the prosecuting attorney or fiscal and the Solicitor General to appear as counsel for the state. No decision shall be handed down unless the Solicitor General issues a certification, which will be quoted in the decision, briefly stating therein his reasons for his agreement or opposition, as the case may be, to the petition, x. x x."

Recognizing that Article 36 of the Family Code was rooted in Canon 1095 of the Canon Law,²⁵ the Court hewed closely to the Church's characterization of what constituted a ground to declare a marriage void *ab initio*. Derived from Canon Law is the principle that the "psychological incapacity" must be *grave, incurable and existing at the time of the celebration of the marriage*.

²⁵ CANON 1095. The following are incapable of contracting marriage:

- 1) those who lack sufficient use of reason;
- 2) those who suffer from a grave lack of discretionary judgment concerning the essential matrimonial rights and obligations to be mutually given and accepted;
- 3) those who, because of causes of a psychological nature, are unable to assume the essential obligations of marriage.

Although this Decision, which I authored, was unanimously carried by the full 15-member Court, it was criticized by many lawyers for its alleged "strictness." My standard reply was that *Molina* was strict only insofar as Article 36 were to be construed as a divorce law, but reasonable if it was correctly deemed to be a ground for declaring a marriage void, not "ended" - one that had never been and therefore could not be "cut."

The guidelines formulated in the *Molina* case were modified later in the year 2003, when I was not yet Chief Justice; thus, the Supreme Court amended the rules governing petitions for the declaration of nullity or annulment of marriages,²⁶ The provision requiring the Office of the Solicitor General to appear as counsel to defend marriage was abandoned. I dissented strongly against this amendment.²⁷

If I may explain, the *Molina* guidelines providing for the active participation and intervention of the OSG were made to ensure that the State acted as defender of marriage in the same way that the *defensor vinculi*²⁸ was required to render opposition actively in church annul-

²⁶ A.M. No. 02-11-IO-SC, effective March 15, 2003.

¹¹ See PANGANIBAN, THE BIO-AGE DAWNS ON THE JUDICIARY, 247-267 (2003), for a full discussion of my dissent on this amended Rule.

²⁸ Otherwise known as the Defender of the Bond. The pertinent Canons provide:

"Can. 1432. A defender of the bond is to be appointed in the diocese for cases which deal with the nullity of ordination or the nullity or dissolution of marriage. The defender of the bond is bound by office to present and expound all that can reasonably be argued against the nullity or dissolution.

ment cases. I felt that without the participation of the OSG, cases decided by the lower courts might no longer be appealed to the Supreme Court; hence, there was nothing to ensure that the required proof was adduced, or to guard against the parties' collusion with each other to have the marriage declared void.

Nonetheless, despite the amendment, I am happy to report that the Court's strict scrutiny of petitions for declaration of marriage nullity remained. Our Supreme Court has thus ruled, at least in those cases elevated to it, that sexual infidelity, perversion, or abandonment do not by themselves constitute psychological incapacity

"Can. 1433. In cases in which the presence x x x of the defender of the bond is required, the acts are invalid if they were not summoned. This does not apply if, although not summoned, they were in fact present or, having studied the acts, able to fulfill their role at least before the judgment.

"Ota, 1434 Unless otherwise expressly provided:

P whenever the law directs that the judge is to hear the parties or either of them, the promotor of justice and the defender of the bond are also to be heard if they are present;

2° whenever, at the submission of a party, the judge is required to decide some matter, the submission of the promotor of justice or of the defender of the bond engaged in the trial has equal weight.

"Can. 1435 It Is the Bishop's responsibility to appoint the promotor of justice and defender of the bond. They are to be clerics or lay persons of good repute, with a doctorate or a licentiate in canon law, and of proven prudence and zeal for justice.

"Can. 1436 §1 The same person can hold the office of promotor of justice and defender of the bond, although not in the same case.

§2 The promotor of justice and the defender of the bond can be appointed for all cases, or for individual cases. They can be removed by the Bishop for a just reason. [CIC 1983]."

within the contemplation of the Family Code.²⁹ Neither may one spouse's emotional immaturity and irresponsibility be equated with psychological incapacity.³⁰ These acts must be shown to be manifestations of a *disordered personality*, which make the respondent *completely* unable to discharge the essential obligations of the marital state. They must not be due merely to a spouse's youth, immaturity,³¹ or sexual promiscuity.

Judicial declaration of nullity of first marriage

The judicial declaration of nullity of the previous marriage before one may remarry is expressly required by another new provision in the Family Code, Article 40, which states, as follows:

"ART. 40. The absolute nullity of a previous marriage may be invoked for purposes of remarriage on the basis solely of a final judgment declaring such marriage void."

As writer of the Supreme Court's Decision in *Mercado v. Tan*³¹ (a criminal case for bigamy), I emphasized that Article 40 of the Family Code had cast aside the statutory mooring of *People v. Mendoza*³³ and *People v. Aragon*.³⁴

²⁹*Dedel v. CA*, 421 SCRA 461, January 29, 2004.

^m *Perez-Ferraris v. Brix Ferraris*, GR No. 162368, July 17, 2006; *Choa v. Choa*, 441 Phil. 175, November 26, 2002; *Republic v. Dagdag*, 351 SCRA 425, February 9, 2001.

³¹ *Hernandez v. CA*, 377 Phil. 919, December 8, 1999.

³² 391 Phil. 809, August 1, 2000.

³³ 95 Phil. 845, September 28, 1954.

³⁴ 100 PhU. 1033, February 28, 1957.

Both of these latter cases held that there was no need for a judicial declaration of nullity of a marriage. Thus, that declaration is now necessary before a spouse can contract a second marriage. Without it, a person may be charged with and convicted of bigamy.

This new ruling in *Mercado v. Tan* was strengthened by *Bobis v. Bobis*,³⁵ which was unanimously promulgated almost on the same day. *Bobis* held that the subsequent filing of a civil action for the declaration of nullity of a previous marriage did not constitute a "prejudicial question" and therefore did not suspend the proceedings in a criminal case for bigamy. The reason was that such declaration, even if obtained, would not have abated the criminal prosecution for the two marriages.³⁶

Strict scrutiny of annulment petitions

Through the years, the Court has consistently upheld the sanctity of marriage and the solidarity of the family by strictly scrutinizing proceedings for the annulment of marriage or the declaration of its nullity. In cases of doubt, it has affirmed the wedding's validity.

In *Ancheta v. Ancheta*,³⁷ for example, the Supreme Court expressed alarm at the way the trial court, without

³⁵ 391 Phil. 648, July 31, 2000.

³⁶ See also *Beltran v. People*, 389 Phil. 447, June 20, 2000.

³⁷ 424 SCRA 725, March 4, 2004. In *Republic v. Dagdag* (supra), while the Supreme Court upheld the validity of the marriage therein, it nevertheless characterized the decision of the trial court as "prematurely rendered" because the investigating prosecutor was not given an opportunity to present controverting evidence before the judgment was rendered.

any objection from the public prosecutor, had declared petitioner in default and proceeded with the trial of the case and the presentation of respondent's evidence in the absence of the complaining spouse.

Reiterating its ruling in *Malcampo-sin v. Sin*,^{3&} the High Court emphasized that the judiciary was tasked with the protection of marriage as an inviolable social institution. This judicial objective was not mere proforma and useless talk, but one that required vigilant and zealous protection. The Supreme Court held that the safeguarding of marriage as a sacred institution required not just the defense of a true and genuine union, but the exposure of an invalid one as well:

"Our Constitution is committed to the policy of strengthening die family as a basic social institution. Our family law is based on the policy that marriage is not a mere contract, but a social institution in which the State is vitally interested. The State can find no stronger anchor than on good, solid, and happy families. The break-up of families weakens our social and moral fabric; hence, their preservation is not the concern of the family members alone. Whether or not a marriage should continue to exist or a family should stay together must not depend on the whims and caprices of only one party, who claims that the other suffers psychological

[^] 355 SCRA 285, March 26, 2001; see also *Republic v. Court of Appeals*, 335 Phil. 664, February 13, 1997.

imbalance, incapacitating such party to fulfill his or her marital duties and obligations."³⁹

Protection of the family in administrative proceedings

To protect the family, the Supreme Court has leaned on the Constitution and the laws in sanctioning the officials and employees of the judiciary, as well as members of the legal profession.

In *Beso v. Daguman*,⁴⁰® respondent judge, in violation of Article 23 of the Family Code, solemnized a marriage outside his jurisdiction and without proper documentation. In this case, the Supreme Court stressed that an elementary regard for the judicial doctrines laid down by superior authority and for sacredness of laws - especially those enacted to preserve so sacrosanct a social institution as marriage - should have made the judge more vigilant in the exercise of his authority as solemnizing officer.

Indeed, the Supreme Court has never hesitated to discipline and impose the severest sanctions on erring members and employees of the judiciary. In suspending a court stenographer found to have an illicit relationship with another employee who was married, it held that there was no dichotomy of morality; thus, court employees should also be judged by their public as well as private morals.⁴¹

³⁹ Per Callejo, Sr. J.

⁴⁰ 323 SCRA 566, January 28, 2000.

⁴¹ *Acebedo v. Arquero*, 447 Phil. 76, March 11, 2003.

In *Narag v. Narag*,⁴² the High Court stressed that parents had not only rights but also duties toward their children. Among these duties were to support, educate and instruct them according to right precepts and good example; and to accord them love, companionship and understanding, as well as moral and spiritual guidance. The Court likewise reminded Atty. Narag, the respondent husband, that he was obliged to live with his wife; to observe mutual love, respect and fidelity; and to give her help and support. The moral delinquency that affected the fitness of a member of the bar to continue as such, the Court added, included conduct that outraged the generally accepted moral standards of the community, as when one made a mockery of the inviolable social institution of marriage. Consequently, Atty. Narag was disbarred from the practice of law.

Family Courts

While on this point, I would like to say a few things regarding the establishment of family courts in the Philippines. On October 28, 1997, Republic Act No. 8369 (entitled "Family Courts Act of 1997") was approved into law. It established family courts, granting them exclusive original jurisdiction over child and family cases.⁴³

⁴² 353 Phil. 643, June 29, 1998.

⁴³ SECTION 5. Jurisdiction of Family Courts. - The Family Courts shall have exclusive original jurisdiction to hear and decide the following cases:

"a) Criminal cases where one or more of the accused is below eighteen (18) years of age but not less than nine (9) years of age but not less than nine (9) years of age or where one or more of the victims

These courts were envisioned to advance the State policies of protecting the rights and promoting the welfare of children. In keeping with the mandate of the Constitution and the precepts of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, these courts were tasked to provide a system of adjudication for youthful offenders, taking into account their peculiar circumstances. Recognizing the sanctity of family life, the courts are required to preserve

is a minor at the time of the commission of the offense: Provided, That if the minor is found guilty, the court shall promulgate sentence and ascertain any civil liability which the accused may have incurred.

"The sentence, however, shall be suspended without need of application pursuant to Presidential Decree No. 603, otherwise known as the "Child and Youth Welfare Code";

"b) Petitions for guardianship, custody of children, habeas corpus in relation to the latter;

"c) Petitions for adoption of children and the revocation thereof;

"d) Complaints for annulment of marriage, declaration of nullity of marriage and those relating to marital status and property relations of husband and wife or those living together under different status and agreements, and petitions for dissolution of conjugal partnership of gains;

"e) Petitions for support and/or acknowledgment;

"f) Summary judicial proceedings brought under the provisions of Executive Order No. 209, otherwise known as the "Family Code of the Philippines";

"g) Petitions for declaration of status of children as abandoned, dependent or neglected children, petitions for voluntary or involuntary commitment of children; the suspension, termination, or restoration of parental authority and other cases cognizable under Presidential Decree No. 603, Executive Order No. 56, (Series of 1986), and other related laws;

"h) Petitions for the constitution of the family home;

"i) Cases against minors cognizable under the Dangerous Drugs Act, as amended;

the solidarity of the family, as well as to provide procedures for the reconciliation of spouses and the amicable settlement of family controversies.⁴⁴

In line with the law establishing family courts, their presiding judge and court personnel are required not only to undergo special training, but also to demonstrate their ability to deal with child and family cases. For this purpose, the Supreme Court provides a continuing education program on child and family laws, procedure and other related disciplines.⁴⁵

During all hearings and conciliations of child and family cases, our courts are mandated to promote the child's and the family's dignity and worth as well as to respect

"j) Violations of Republic Act No. 7610, otherwise known as the *"Special Protection of Children Against Child Abuse, Exploitation and Discrimination Act,"* as amended by Republic Act No. 7658; and

"k) Cages of domestic violence against:

- 1) Women - which are acts of gender based violence that results, or are likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women; and other forms of physical abuse such as battering or threats and coercion which violate a woman's personhood, integrity and freedom movement; and
- 2) Children - which include the commission of all forms of abuse, neglect, cruelty, exploitation, violence, and discrimination and all other conditions prejudicial to their development.

"If an act constitutes a criminal offense, the accused or batterer shall be subject to criminal proceedings and the corresponding penalties.

"If any question involving any of the above matters should arise as an incident in any case pending in the regular courts, said incident shall be determined in that court."

⁴⁴ RA 8669, Sec. 2.

⁴⁵ Id., Sec. 4.

their privacy. Records of the cases shall be treated with utmost confidentiality, and the identity of parties shall not be divulged unless necessary and with authority from the judge.⁴⁶

In addition, as part of the judiciary's vision of providing an accessible, inexpensive, efficient and effective justice system, the Supreme Court promulgated new rules for family court cases on March 15, 2003. These rules make the family courts more accessible to affected party-litigants.

Marriage and the Family in Other Countries

As the Philippine judiciary continues to pursue efforts to help protect the family, it realizes that, now and then, courts are confronted with new challenges. While some of these problems stem from our own society, more and more emanate from changes and developments in other countries. Some of the trends⁴⁷ that impact on families elsewhere around the globe are (1) changes in family Structures, (2) demographic ageing, and the (3) rise of migration. The "negative effects" of these onslaughts require all of us to remain vigilant in protecting our families.

Changes in Family Structures

During the last 50 years, there has been an evident shift from extended to nuclear families. Also on the rise

⁴⁶ Id., Sec. 12.

⁴⁷ <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/famiiy/majortrends.htm>.

are one-person households, as well as cohabitation without marriage. Falling fertility rates, migration, and increases in divorce rates and the number of older persons are responsible for smaller-size households, which have fallen to an average of 3.7 persons in East Asia, 4.9 in Southeast Asia, 4.1 in the Caribbean, 5.7 in North Africa and 2.8 in developed regions. Age at first marriage has risen to between the mid to late 20s in all regions of the world, often as a result of better educational and employment opportunities for women. Further, women are becoming mothers later in life and are having fewer children. Current fertility rates are 1.57 children per woman in developed regions, 3.1 in less developed countries, and 5.47 in the least developed countries.

Demographic Ageing

On the other hand, lower fertility rates and higher life expectancies account for a bigger group of older persons within the overall population. Globally, the elderly (60 years and over) will more than triple from 606 million to 2 billion by 2050. In developed regions, 20 per cent of the population are older than 60; by 2050, they shall have reached 33 per cent. Their share in developing regions will increase from 8 per cent to 20 per cent.

Of course, what is more telling from these data is that support ratios (or the number of working people in relation to retired persons) have been declining. Ageing also impacts on inter-generational solidarity, housing, social security systems, care giving and health costs.

Rise of migration

Today, 175 million people (or 3 per cent of the world's population) reside outside their country of birth. In fact, there were 20 million refugees in 2001. The main causes of migration have been violence, discrimination, natural disasters, and the hope for better economic opportunities.

Migration can be a major stress on family life due to cultural, ethnic, racial and religious differences, and the lack of integration. Seasonal and internal migration of men, in particular, contributes to higher numbers of female-headed households around the world. Worse, the trafficking and sexual exploitation of women and children have increased and have become major activities of organized crime.

These trends challenge not only the ability to fulfill basic human functions of production, reproduction and socialization; they also test the needs of family members for health, nutrition, shelter, physical and emotional care, and personal development.

Closing

In the face of these challenges, the Philippines realizes that the family remains to be our single most important hope in keeping our societies intact and functional. Thus, I believe that safeguarding and enhancing the family's well-being is not just a responsibility of the Church and the State. Rather, it is the responsibility of

everyone who cares enough to strengthen and promote the solidarity and total development of the family.

As; I close, let me stress that the union of a man and woman is the most enduring human institution - honored and encouraged in all cultures and by every religious faith. Ages of experience have taught humanity that the commitment of a husband and wife to love and to serve each other promotes the welfare of children and the stability of society.

A legacy that we can give to our children is this cherished value of family-centeredness. We must provide them, then, with good role models. As they will carry the torch into the next millennium, it is important that we equip them with the necessary tools to inherit and represent our community. This we can do by defending and strengthening the family, God's hope for humanity.



Filipino Family by Angel Cacnio

Sacred Heart Seminary in Palo, Leyte: Past, Present and Future¹

RAMON B. AGUILOS, MSEM, STD*

Introduction

Why mark a special importance on these 50 long years of staying in Palo? Well, this is where Sacred Heart Seminary finally found a place she can call "home". As a backgrounder, it must never be forgotten that the first

¹ This paper was delivered during a conference on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of Sacred Heart Seminary in Palo, Leyte. A major part of this presentation was culled from previous articles of the same theme by the same author. Cfr: RAMON S. B. AGUILOS, *Seminary Education in the Archdiocese of Palo: History, Reflections and Future Perspectives*, Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Universidad de Navarra, Pamplona 1996; "The Sacred Heart Seminary of Palo (Leyte): the First Twenty-Five Years (1944-1969)," in *Philippiniana Sacra* 32 (1997) 265-297; "The Sacred Heart Seminary of Palo (Leyte) Under the Diocesan Clergy (1969-1994)," in *Philippiniana Sacra* 33 (1998) 272-308; "Insights into the Seminary Education of the Area-diocese of Palo," in *Ichthus* 1 (2000) 97-126; "Sacred Heart Seminary After 60 Years: Sketches from a Formator's Viewpoint" in *Stella Maris* (2005) 9-13.

*The author is an alumnus of Sacred Heart Seminary, having graduated high school in 1974, and college in 1978. He, too, was a former formator and

seminarians of the seminary stayed for four months from June to October 1944 in the then-abandoned Holy Infant Academy. That compound is where the multiplex structures of the Sto. Nino Rectory, the Parish Social Hall and other Parish Commissions Offices now stand. Then the seminarians sought temporary lodgings in the then Tacloban Catholic Institute until 1945 before moving to another abandoned *colegio* behind the Church of the Assumption of Our Lady in Tanauan. The latter became their temporary home until 1956.

As former students in Latin we remember this quote: "*respice, adspice, prospice*" - a motto that can be loosely rendered as "understand the past, know the present, look to the future," It is on an occasion like the fiftieth year celebration of the Sacred Heart Seminary in Palo that past, present, and future converge. This homecoming puts us to the task of recalling where we have been, celebrating who we are, and faithfully looking to the future with hope and courage.

The so-called "past" as far this gathering is concerned begins in 1956, the year this seminary was moved from Tanauan to Palo. It becomes the starting point of our discussion as we rummage through those fifty years. I

teacher of the same institution between the years 1982-1992, and 1997-2001. He served in various capacities: as Assistant Dean of Students, Spiritual Director, Dean of Studies and "Vice-Rector. He also taught subjects like Communication Arts, English Literature, Latin, Spanish, Social Science and History of Philosophy. He is now the parish priest of St. Joseph Parish, San Jose\ Tacloban City, even as he holds the office of the Superintendent of Catholic Schools in the Archdiocese of Palo, at the same time the Spiritual Director of the Archdiocesan Office on "Women, as well as the Media Liaison of the archdiocese.

invite you to get to know the persons behind this institution, the architects of a dream. Certainly they were too many: Bishop Manuel Mascarifias, who founded the seminary in 1944, Bishop Lino Gonzaga, for continuing the work started by his predecessor, the SVD Fathers, the benefactors, the parish priests, the faithful - they were dreamers, they wanted a seminary in the Diocese of Palo that would form young boys and men to the priesthood and to serve the local church.

So, let us acknowledge the architects of a dream that has made Sacred Heart Seminary what it is now. We have to clearly understand the present, and look to the uncertain future trusting in God's provident care. We are today grateful recipients of the forward-thinking people who braved the storms and laid the foundations of this institution. We also are indebted to the succeeding generation of seminary formators who carried their forebears' legacy of dedication, hard work, and perseverance in the seminary apostolate through difficult times. While we remember the courage and vision that drove the architects of this seminary to dream, plan, and build an institution, while we recall with fondness the members of the diocesan clergy who have carried on the work of forming future priests for the archdiocese, we nonetheless are asked to understand the present and courageously confront the challenges of the future.

The SVD's in Palo, 1956-1969

Even as early as 1948, plans were already afloat for the construction of a new seminary at a different site. Bishop Mascarifias was no longer content with the rickety

buildings and the cramped compound in Tanauan. The cornerstone was laid at a site in Palo on June 29, 1948. Money was raised throughout the war-torn diocese, and construction was promptly started. Unluckily it came to an abrupt halt; money drained out to the last penny. A serious economic slump ensuing from the war, the devastating storms and floods, and other pressing problems, accounted for the impossibility of going on with the construction.² What was left of the proposed building? *Stella Maris* '55[^] said this all "[Nothing but] walls, only walls [and] iron frames sticking out, gnarled into the blue sky."⁴ But in 1952, the new bishop, Lino Gonzaga, revived the plans. He called for contribution and donations, and pegged priests to a certain quota *sub poena suspensionis*. Construction started on January 17, 1955. By June 1956, the seminarians moved into the new building. On June 11, 1956, classes were held for the tot time in Palo. Formal inauguration and blessing happened on August 6 of that year. Archbishop Julio Rosales delivered the allocution, Bishop Manuel Mascarinas was given the honor of blessing the buildings, while Bishop Lino Gonzaga officiated the Mass of Thanksgiving. That evening, "Everyman," a fifteenth century morality play, was staged by the seminarians before a large crowd.

² Cfr. BARTOLOME PASTOR. JR., "Leyte's Church and Clergy," Unpublished College Thesis, Sacred Heart Seminary, Palo 1960, pp. 60-61.

³ This is the name of the student publication of the Sacred Heart Seminary. It started as a class project in 1948, then it became a school publication published semi-annually until 1965; it is now just an annual publication.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 61,

Here's an account by Seminarian Bartolome Pastor, Jr., who as a first-year college student wrote a term paper. He describes the first year in Sacred Heart Seminary in Palo:

"In the school year, 1956-1957, for the first time, the seminary had 50 newcomers, and a total enrollment of 161. In that same year the grand total number of seminarians of the Diocese of Palo studying in Cebu and in Manila was 172 - still unsurpassed."⁵

But it was time for some changes in the faculty and administration. In 1958, Father Topfer left for a much-needed vacation in Germany. Father Vicente Braganza, fresh from his studies at the Gregorian University in Rome, replaced him as rector. Father Geronimo Galvan, an Argentinean, was prefect of discipline. Fathers Delfin Taguinod, Stanley Plutz and Raymund Quetchenbaeh came at varying periods of time.

The policies and daily schedule of the seminary were essentially the same as what the seminarians had in Tanauan. Policies were spelled out in the *Vade Mecum*, a list of rules and regulations which seminarians had to follow.

In the meantime, the Second Vatican Council was convoked in 1962, an epochal event that would spell out changes in the church, and in them, shifts in seminary policies. This would not be felt in Sacred Heart Seminary

⁵ *ibid.*, 62.

until years later. Seminarians were practically in isolation from this event-of-a-lifetime. They still had their books, their *Orate Fratres*, *Cantate*, *Vade Mecum*, Selected Prayers for Seminarians. But then came passwords like "exposures" and "experimentations." Seminarians' naivete and their so-called "seclusion from outside world" were being challenged. Yet, it would take time before these issues turned full blast in the seminary campus.

Incidentally, Bishop Lino Gonzaga had been appointed archbishop of the newly created archdiocese of Zamboanga in 1967. His successor was Bishop Teotimo Pacis, a member of the Congregation of Missions, better known as *Padres Paules*. It was in his two-year stint as bishop of Palo that the seminary would undergo some changes and the move towards liberalization in seminary policies would begin to show some definite signs.

For instance, during the school year 1967-1968, the upper three classes in college were made to study at the Seminario Mayor de San Carlos in Cebu to which, at the time, Palo was a suffragan diocese. It was believed that combining the seminarians of the suffragan dioceses would be economically wholesome for the region. Also, with one regional seminary alone, a pool of professors could be gathered from the mother diocese and the suffragan dioceses. Whatever happened to this idea is not known, since in the succeeding years, the sending of seminarians to Cebu would not continue. By 1970, Sacred Heart Seminary would once again experience a full four-year complement in the college department.

In 1968, Maasin became a separate diocese with Bishop Vicente Ataviado as its first bishop. From then on,

seminarians belonging to the new ecclesiastical jurisdiction began setting their eyes more on Cebu than Palo for their seminary formation.

Another indication of the new wave of changes was the presence of lay women as teachers. The idea was not just to relieve the faculty problem, but also to give seminarians more exposure to members of the opposite sex, something unthinkable a few years earlier.

In the school year 1968-1969, the college seminarians were enrolled at the SVD-run Divine Word University of Tacloban. It was supposed to be an implementation of a plan for an experiment on socialization. Their full contact with the university students would improve their sociability. But at the end of the school year, an evaluation was made, and the conclusion drawn was, while there was a marked growth of seminarians' social awareness, their intellectual and spiritual values were negatively affected. By the school year 1969-1970, classes in college were back in the seminary. The experiment was deemed a failure.

Departure of the SVD's

At about the same time the SVD Fathers were being phased out of the seminary. In 1968, Father Adolf Baden, the seminary rector, received a plaque of appreciation from the diocese through the hands of Bishop Pacis, who, at the time, was also leaving Palo for a different pastoral assignment. In the following year, in 1969, the SVD Fathers formally relinquished their charge over the seminary. During the graduation rites, Msgr. Zenón Ocampo, Vicar

Capitular of the diocese, presented to the society, represented by Father Benjamin Janea, former prefect of discipline, a bronze plaque as "token of deep gratitude for the society's generosity, and to the fathers who had toiled, sweated, and sacrificed for the shaping of her seminary and for the molding of her sons as priests."

The other SVD Missionaries who worked in the seminary from 1961 to 1969 were: Fathers Jesus del Rosario, Wenceslao Feman, Frederick Buwi, Dennis Mckillip, Pedro Kranewitter, Adolf Baden, Quintin Terrenal, Helmuth Peter, Maurice Spieker, Leo Muehl, Adolfo Ruhl, Friedrich Kornfeld, Hermann Schablitzki, Leonardo Mercado, Macario Magboo, Cornelio Alpuerto, Leo Valera, Herman Wijtten, Fermin Dichoso, Edmund Weiss, and Victor Drewes, the latter being the last SVD Rector of Sacred Heart Seminary.

The "Take-over" and the ferment of the seventies

The take-over of the diocesan priests for the seminary administration happened in a gradual fashion. As early as 1967-1968, young priests from the diocesan clergy had joined the seminary teaching staff: Fathers Bartolome Pastor, Cecilio Sipaco, Pablito Tantoy and Ramon Salazar. By 1968-1969, there were already some diocesan priests occupying key positions: Fathers Vicente Lora as the prefect of studies, Filomeno Bactol as the procurator, and Herminigildo Adolfo as the assistant prefect of the minors. Father Galo Montano came in as classroom instructor.

Came the school year 1969-1970 when the take-over of the diocesan clergy happened in full force. For the first time the priests-alumni of Sacred Heart Seminary were

taking the cudgels of the seminary administration. Father Cipriano Hadlocon, back from his stay in the US, assumed his position as rector. His staff included Fathers Galo Montano as vice-rector, Alvimano Villamor, spiritual director, Vicente Lora, prefect of studies, Filomeno Bactol, procurator, Aresio Astorga, prefect of discipline of the majors. Fathers Jaime Segun and Pablito Tantoy were with the staff during the first semester.

Thus began a new epoch in the seminary history. Aside from the fact that it was the local clergy's turn to address issues in seminary administration, the seminary was entering into an interesting period of contemporary history,, the so-called, "sound and fury of the renewal."

Bishop Manuel Salvador took the place of Bishop Pacis as Bishop of Palo, and with this change of leadership came a new set of seminary administration. Msgr. Esteban Justimbaste was appointed rector. Joining him were Fathers Leonardo Medroso as vice-rector and prefect of the majors, Alejandrino Parilla as vice-prefect of the majors, Oscar Lorenzo as prefect of studies, Antonio Adre, spiritual director of the minors, Fernando Almadro assistant. Three fathers were "old hands," having been members of the staff the previous year or two: Fathers Filomeno Bactol, procurator, Aresio Astorga prefect of the minors and Galo Montano, spiritual director of the majors.

The take-over was not without difficulties and problems. Aspects of formation needed to be responded to right away: salaries for teachers, honoraria for the fathers, budget for the library, repair and maintenance of the house, and food, among others.

The solution of Bishop Salvador was to send the college seminarians back to Cebu. He was in agreement with the other suffragan bishops to have one regional seminary for seminarians of the Cebu ecclesiastical province. Thus for the school year 1971-1972, the first- and second-year college students enrolled in the newly constructed San Carlos Seminary-College in Cebu, while the third- and fourth-year college people were left behind in Palo, in view of the plan to phase out the college level and to leave the seminary with just the high school department.

For reasons we cannot easily recount here, and despite the wholesome intention and good motivation of the good bishop and the seminary fathers, the move failed to materialize. The following year the seminarians were pulled out of Cebu and were sent back to Palo. The Palo seminary, which was in danger of being closed, was in full operation once more.

The seventies saw the seminary in synch with the all the seminaries in the world - experiencing the aftermath of Vatican II. All of a sudden there was a new spirit and concomitant to it, new demands. Seminarians let off steam, as it were, of their own thoughts of the current issues, both sacred and secular. The *Stella Maris*, the seminary student annual, reflected the seeds of democracy and the fermenting character of the times. Seminarians expressed in print their critical views and observations regarding seminary formation. The new generation of seminarians called themselves, "the Angry Breed," who revolted in silence and viewed developments with a wary eye. Some blamed the seminary's tendency to dwell in the past and

hankered for a meaningful training that would meet the needs of the day.

On the practical plane, seminarians were sporting long hair, wearing sandals, and enjoying greater freedom of movement everywhere. In 1972, the seminarians presented a one-act play, "The Death of a Dream." For the first time in the school's history, young ladies took part in the stage presentation and shared lead roles with the seminary actors. In that same production, seminarians tied up with female students of a nearby school and formed a polyphonic choir. The public was taking notice of the changing aspect in seminary life - all in the name of *socialization*.

Such was the conditions of the times. Seminarians were impatient to push towards new shores. Their fresh idealism urged them to cry and demand for anything: for academic excellence, for involvement in the outside world, for adjustment to new trends. To the seminary fathers, it was a huge challenge. They had to respond to this clarion call.

Thus began an "open-door policy" to formation. Where before the strains of classical music reverberated through the halls of the seminary, the fathers now began allowing *The Beatles* and other contemporary tunes to be aired. Periods of strict silence were reduced. Parents, relatives and friends of seminarians could now come to the seminary at more frequent intervals. Dialogue and communication between seminarians and fathers became more habitual. At the bottomline was a gradual discarding of the old view that a vocation could be best nourished

by sheltering it away from the corrupt world; the seminarians must face the world and be involved in its struggle.

The seminary administration at this point of the seminary history (1972-1973) were as follows:

Father Oscar Lorenzo became the rector midway through the school year. Appointed to the seminary were Fathers Benjamin Bacier, Benjamin Gobenciong, and Herminigildo Adolfo. With the staff were sisters of the Religious of the Virgin Mary (RVM). Their presence would start a wave of sisters' from other congregation being assigned to the seminary as high school principals, teachers or members of the administrative staff. Under the rectorship of Father Lorenzo, three more priests joined the staff in subsequent years; Fathers Domingo Matiga, Salvador Dumas, and Isidoro Villarino.

On June 14, 1973, Bishop Cipriano Urgel, hitherto Bishop of Calbayog, was installed fifth bishop of the Diocese of Palo.

The mid-seventies was a period of exceptional turmoil. Social, economic, and political conditions of the country were at their nadir, massive street rallies were at their height. Phrases like "the New Society," "democratic revolution," and "human rights" were part of the ordinary parlance. Seminary fathers were, wittingly or unwittingly, orienting the seminarians towards a critical awareness of the present realities. Socio-political issues merited discussions and reflections, and more importantly, action.

Faculty development; varied themes and other issues

Father Lorenzo was replaced by a returnee, Father Bactol, after the latter's stint as director of the Holy Cross Academy in Carigara. Father Silas Florencio became the dean of students of the college department. Completing the roster were Fathers Salvador Dumas, Florencio Geronas, and Isidoro Villarino. Father Aluino Estalilla moved in as a member of the teaching staff. The next school year, Father Dumas left for a post outside the seminary and Father Raul Kempis came in.

In 1977, when Father Bactol went on study leave for a master's degree in Educational Management at the De La Salle University, Father Andres Villarante became the acting rector. The other fathers were Wilfredo Alejan, and Isidro Arroyo and a deacon, Reverend Jerome Costibolo. By the end of the decade, Fathers Vicente Purgatorio and William Antillon joined the staff, while Father Leonardo Medroso, now parish priest of the Palo Cathedral, taught subjects in Philosophy.

Father Bactol's study leave meant one thing; the issue on faculty development necessitated a definite response. The seminary, being an educational institution recognized by the government, needed administrators with the requisite academic qualifications. Strictly speaking, the government required - it still does - school heads, principals, deans and college teachers to have master's degrees. How to cope with these demands has been an issue until the present.

Then there was the problem of perseverance, or the priests' sustaining effort to remain in the seminary for

longer periods. Owing to the situation, many seminary fathers had to be pulled out of the seminary and were given pastoral assignments. A worse scenario happened when others left for the bigger city like Manila, never to return.

The mid-seventies saw new thrusts and the emergence of new attitudes. While the order of the day was being followed, class schedules gave way to out-of-classroom and off-campus activities. In five-years time, from 1975 to 1980, the seminary went through variegated themes along with sudden shifts of emphasis and orientation,

First, the seminary shifted toward pastoral orientation, perhaps in an attempt to sober down the fiery and fermenting concept of "social awareness" of the first half of the decade. The formators saw that placing great weight solely on the spiritual and intellectual dimension did not satisfactorily meet the demand for a socially responsible priest. An updated program had to be structured with equal accent in the social role of priests. So, apostolate work went on an upswing and there was a predilection for a service-oriented policy. Seminarians visited prisons and hospitals, conducted weekly seminars and Bible services, made house visits. With the help of religious sisters, new methods of catechism were developed. A barrio mission was organized, thanks to Father Silas Florencio, the apostolate director.

But, like a sudden change of gears, the school year 1976-1977 called for "a spiritual renewal." The theme did not mean an altogether change of a new idea of

formation, but a mere shift of stress to the dimension of the spiritual.

In the school year 1977-1978, "Manual Labor" was chosen as the theme, and it was a year marked with frequent excursion to the fields. Armed with no less than sticks and spades, iron bars and *bolos*, seminarians wrestled with the soil and the sun.

When Father Bactol resumed his post as rector he put into execution his newly acquired expertise in educational management. His return likewise signaled a return of emphasis to intellectual development. It was not enough for the priest to have faith, he said, [the priest] had to be able to articulate it. The theme on intellectual formation could not have been more timely. The constant change of emphasis in orientation, thrusts and policies left the intellectual climate in the seminary so much to be desired. Seminarians had become less interested in their studies. The library was wanting in books. The academic curriculum needed a thorough review. Priests assigned in the seminary needed further academic training to meet the necessary demands and formation.

Back to the basics

The close of the Seventies ushered in a "new age" - the simmering down of all the ferment, thrill, and excitement of the early seventies, the veering back towards the primordial values of seminary formation. All the trial-and-error methods of experimentations ended. All the "much ado" for new ways found not solutions but more and bigger problems. There needed some tightening of

the screws. A back-to-the-basics strategy - a renewed disposition to the tried-and-tested ways of the old - became the seminary's battlecry.

The seminary line-up of formators at the same time: Father Bactol as the rector, Father Villarante the college spiritual director. Father Aluino Estalilla returned in 1981 to the seminary after his graduate studies in educational management. As vice rector and dean of students, he enforced the rigors of strict discipline, a style that echoed the regimen of the SVD's of old. Adding youth and vigor to the team were three newly ordained priests: Fathers Virgilio Canete, Manuel Damayo, and Manuel Salarda. Together they formed a closely knit crew that shared each others' resources in molding the minds of future priests; theirs was a team that restructured the seminary vision, took on old characteristics, and carried that spirit onward until the second half of the decade.

The rectorship of Father Bactol lasted until 1985. Mid-way through the course he was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Palo and Titular of Germaniciana. His Episcopal consecration took place at the Palo Cathedral on October 15, 1981, the principal consecrator being Archbishop Bruno Torpigliani, the Apostolic Nuncio to the Philippines. Meantime there would be a continuous turn-over of staff members in the seminary to replace the ones assigned to the parishes. A retired priest, Father Niceforo Pongos, was added into the faculty. Father Aresio Astorga was asked to teach in philosophy courses even as he continued being parish priest. Fathers Ramdn Aguilos and Nicolas Valeriano came in 1982, Bienvenido Ebcas in 1983, Romeo Salazar

and Gilbert Urbina in 1984. Father Rafael Pepito, worked part-time as music director of the college department.

Also considered an important event was the elevation of the Diocese of Palo as and archdiocese on November 15, 1982. Bishop Urgel became its first Archbishop. The canonical erection took place on February 14, 1983 during the solemn rites officiated by Archbishop Bruno Torpigliani, the Papal Nuncio to the Philippines.

Mid-eighties: Expansion

Bishop Bactol remained the rector even after his Episcopal appointment. And it was he who initiated the construction of a new college building in 1983. At the start of the school year 1984-1985 the college seminarians moved into their new home. The transfer made the division between the college and high school departments more distinct. With Bishop Bactol's appointment as parish priest of Sto. Nino in 1984, Father Gil Canete, who had served as vice rector and dean of students of the college department, took over as acting rector. During the commencement exercises on March 31, 1985, Father Jerome Costibolo took his oath of office before Archbishop Urgel as the new rector of the seminary.

But less than a month after, on April 22, Archbishop Urgel succumbed to a heart failure and Bishop Bactol was appointed Apostolic Administrator. Six months later, Bishop Pedro Dean, at the time Bishop of Tagum was appointed archbishop of Palo and took rectorship on December 13, 1985.

The seminary administration was beefed up in 1985 by the arrival of two deacons: Reverends Tirso Dolina and Alex Opiniano, who would later be ordained priests mid-way through the year. The set-up likewise underwent slight variations. In 1986 the rector was assisted by two vice rectors: Father Canete for administration, and Father Aguilos for academics.

Also noted at this time was the marked increase of high school graduates of outside schools entering the seminary. But while these young men had all the interest for seminary formation, the administrators noticed that they could not easily insert themselves into the mainstream of seminary life. Noted was their difficulty in learning the languages, especially Latin. Their written and spoken English were deficient. To address the situation, the seminary toyed with the idea of opening a pre-college department.

This department opened in 1986. Fourteen young men comprised the pioneer batch. Completing the family were three seminarians on regency and Reverend Jose Glenn Diaz as the formation director.

In December of 1986 Father Costibolo was assigned as Archdiocesan Chancellor and Father - later Monsignor - Benjamin Sabillo, who had just arrived from his studies in Rome, became the new rector. Fathers Canete, Valeriano, Aguilos, Salazar, Dolina, Opiniano, and Diaz were already in the seminary when the new rector came. The other priests who were assigned to the seminary at varying periods during the Msgr. Sabillo's rectorship were: Fathers Gil Logramonte, Manuel Ocana, Lester Avestruz, Winston

Margate, Pedro Tiguelo, Alex Compas, Ananias Merida, Hector Villamii, Isagani Petilos, and Edgar Macalalag. Listed as part-time lecturers were Msgr. Estanislao Abarca, Msgr. Benjamin Bacierra and Father Joseph Diamante. Mention also may be made to seminarians - now - priests who served in the seminary as regents during this period: Edgar Macalalag, Joselito Laurente, Restituto Lumbre, Edgar Mallen, Romeo Barcelo, Carlito Loreto and Adrian Barcelo.

The seminary in the 90's

Toward the end of 1991, Msgr. Wilfredo Alejan took the reins as Msgr. Sabillo was assigned to a parish. The new rector was not treading on an unfamiliar ground. Having been assigned to the seminary before, he certainly knew the ropes.

During his rectorship the following priests composed the staff at one time or the other: Fathers Alex Compas, Filomeno Borqueta, Hector Villamii, Oscar Florencio, Edgar Macalalag, Isagani Petilos, Ananias Merida. Following some turn-over of assignments, these priests joined the community: Fathers Dennis Inocando, Virgilio Manaog, and Erlito Maraya.

It was during Msgr. Alejan's rectorship when a big-bang affair was held in Sacred Heart Seminary. It was the occasion of the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the institution that, for the last 50 years, had been churning up priests for Palo and nearby dioceses. A grand home-coming of its alumni - priests and laymen alike - took place from September 12-16, 1994.

When Msgr. Alejan left his post for a new assignment, he entrusted the care of the seminary to Father Alex Compas, who served as acting rector until 1995 when Father (later Monsignor) Alex Opiniano flew in from his studies in Manila to become the new head of the 51-year-old seminary.

Msgr. Opiniano's time as rector spelled out - to some extent - transformations for the seminary both as an institution and as a community. A seminary foundation was established and within a short period the whole community was able to raise an initial capital of about Php1.2 million, the interest of which was used to subsidize particular needs of the seminary. This foundation had also been able to shoulder expenses of seminary fathers' attendance at conferences, seminars, institutes of spirituality and other avenues for faculty development. It also underwrote the repair and restoration of community structures which have long deteriorated.

The fathers who worked under his leadership (which lasted until 2001) were the following: Fathers Dennis Inocando, Erlito Maraya, Edgar Macalalag, Filomeno Borgueta, Samuel Alvero, Dennis Soon, Isagani Petilos, Pedro Tiguelo, Ronel Taboso, Raymund Mazo, Carlos Rodriguez, Amadeo Alvero, Mansueto Sosing, Francisco Colasito. New faces in the teaching staff were Msgr. Cesar Petilla, Fathers Erby Davy Lajara, Raul Gaviola, Erwin Balagapo, and Randolf Raagas. Msgr. Ramon Aguilos returned to serve as the academic dean of the college from 1998 to 2001; this assignment was in a concurrent capacity

with the one he was holding at the time: that of being the Vice Rector for Administration, then Academic Dean of SJEST.

The ushering of the "Millennium Years"

Father Joseph Cesar Diamante assumed his post in January of 2001. He was assisted, in the main, by Father Erlito Maraya, who also held positions as Academic Dean (having just earned a doctorate in Philosophy in the University of Navarra, Spain), Spiritual Director, Dean of Students and Vocation Director. Apart from those already mentioned above, the next line-up of fathers who collaborated with him in the training of future priests were the following: Fathers Raymund Calubid, Ramil Costibolo, Romel Apurillo, Elrico Fabiolas, Oliver Mazo, Virgilio Murillo, Alcris Badana, Engelbert Tiu, Kelvin Joy Apurillo, Wilson Chu, Elmo Borgueta (who was then the Dean of Studies in the late nineties; he also was a returnee, having just come from his studies in Canon Law in Rome), Erby Davy Lajara and Raymund Mazo. Also part of the staff were extraordinary confessors and spiritual directors for the seminarians: Erwin Balagapo, Edgar Macalalag, Armando Dagsa, Dennis Molabola, and Virgilio Manaog.

Father Diamante was assigned Chancellor in 2005 and his post as rector was passed on to Father Virgilio Manaog. Father Gil had been a formator of SHS in 1993-1995 before he left for Pamplona, Spain and later, Rome, Italy, for further ecclesiastical studies. He, too, had been

the Spiritual Director of SJEST prior to this assignment. In his first year as rector last year, he was assisted in his administration and formation work by the following priests: Fathers Erlito Maraya, Kelvin Joy Apurillo, Filomeno Borqueta, Dennis Inocando (now with a doctorate in Philosophy), Engelbert Tiu, Wilson Chu. Sr. Ma. Josefina Almarines. RVM, served as the high school principal. Priests serving either as spiritual directors or members of the faculty included Fathers Erwin Balagapo, Joseph Cesar Diamante, Erby Davy Lajara, Edgar Macalalag, Raymund Mazo and Dennis Molabola.

In spite of the meager resources, SHS started to shape Up when it had some improvements here and there, at least, to render the place habitable and safe. Just recently, under the present leadership, it underwent a major overhaul of its physical structures. I need not describe to you the renovations that our alma mater has undergone. I also leave it to Father Virgilio Manaog and the rest of the seminary fathers to explain to us how they did the almost impossible in giving the buildings a thorough "make-over". I believe the seminary faculty has opened the whole house for us to go around, take a look at the improvements, reminisce our days in here, spot all those favorite nooks and crannies and be grateful we were all here once in our lifetime. And the seminary fathers will be most grateful if we could shell out some of our personal resources for the upkeep of our alma mater.

The present set-up in the seminary administration:

Rev. Virgilio Manaog, STD: Rector

Rev. Erlito Maraya, PhD: Dean of Studies/Spiritual
Director College Department

Rev. Albert Clyde Anover, STB: Procurator/Spiritual
Director, High School Department/Pastoral Director
College Department

Rev. Benito Trocino, STB: Dean of Students/Sports
Moderator College Department

Rev. Dennis Inocando, PhD: Dean of Students, Pre-
College Formation

Rev. Eduardo Tantuico, STB, PhL: Dean of Students,
HS Department

Sr. Ma. Josefina Almarines. RVM: Principal, High School
Department

The formators are assisted by eleven faculty members and four non-teaching staff.

Above all, the Archdiocese of Palo has a new shepherd, the seventh to take the cudgels of pastoral leadership in this 69-year-old diocese - Archbishop Jose Serofia Palma, a native of Dingle, Iloilo. He was appointed to the Archdiocese on March 19, 2006 and was installed on May 2. He is ably assisted by Bishop Isabelo Abarquez the Auxiliary Bishop of Palo. The second to be appointed auxiliary bishop of Palo, Bishop Abarquez, Titular of Talaptula, received his appointment papers for Palo on June 19, 2004.

The present student population of Sacred Heart Seminary:

./., *By Department:*

<i>College Department</i>		<i>High School Department</i>		<i>Pre-college Department</i>	<i>Total</i>
				17	17
AB 1	20	HS 1	22		42
AB 2	15	HS 2	27		42
AB 3	7	HS 3	21		28
AB 4	10	HS 4	5		15
<i>Total</i>	52		75	17	144

//., *By Diocese*

Palo	119
Naval	15
Maasin	5
Catarman	3
Calbayog	2
<i>Total</i>	144

III. *By Vicariate in the Archdiocese of Palo*

Tacloban	39
Ormoc	20
Palompon	16
Palo	15
Abuyog	11
Carigara	11
Burauen	7
<i>Total</i>	119

Epilogue

In the meantime, we continue to dream. We move to the future. The world is very different now than it was fifty years ago. Every day brings another advance, another leap forward. The good old days are both good and old, But the future is where we, the priests, the seminarians and former seminarians, move. This is our challenge. This is our responsibility. We cannot live in the past nor can We repeat it. The Sacred Heart Seminary must step up. It must stand up. It must move. We cannot let the future down.

In 1959, the young seminarian Bartolome Pastor wrote in that same paper:

"Three years have already passed since the transfer here [and] manifold achievements have been attained. The 20-hectar compound has been beautified, utilized and cultivated. A splendid church has been added to the three original buildings; and very soon the seminary will have a magnificent and spacious and concrete auditorium. More improvements are being done and still much more are expected...."^

Seminarian Pastor at the time that he wrote the paper already had some sources from which he was able to bring back the past; he was deeply in touch with the present,

⁶ *ibid.*

even as he was full of dreams for the future. And so, like this then young seminarian who is now a priest with 39 years in the ministry, we dream this dream. But if we dream alone, a dream is all it will ever be. Let us share this dream. Support this dream. Make it our own. The one thing that unites you all today and the days hereafter during this homecoming is that we all studied in Sacred Heart Seminary. May that unity be the one thing that translates a dream into a reality.

Statement: Asian Liturgy Forum - Southeast Asian Region

ASIAN LITURGY FORUM DELEGATES

From October 22-26, 2006, we, the delegates to the 10* Asian Liturgy Forum, met in Chiang Mai, Thailand under the generous auspices of the Commission on Liturgy of the Bishops' Conference of Thailand. The delegates represented Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, Philippines, Indonesia, and Taiwan.

Taking inspiration from the words of John Paul U in *Ecdesia in Asia*, namely that the liturgy is "a decisive means of evangelization, especially in Asia, where the followers of different religions are so drawn to worship, religious festivals and popular devotions" (n. 22) and in the wake of Asian Mission Congress held in Chiang Mai, we discussed the role the liturgy plays in the missionary life of the Church. We now share the fruits of our discussions.

1) We affirm that the mission of Jesus Christ endures in the Church in the form of *martyria* (life of witnessing), *leiturgia* (life of worship), and *diakonia* (life of service). Among these, *leiturgia*, being the summit and source of the life and activities of the Church (cf. SC 10), rightly holds preeminence.

2) The liturgy is a powerful moment of encounter with Jesus in which his story comes alive through the readings of Scripture, preaching, and the celebration of the sacraments and liturgical feasts. Hence, the language and symbols of the liturgy should be accessible to the assembly that celebrates it.

3) Since the mission of the Church is to welcome all to Christ's embrace, the liturgy - which is primarily a celebration of the faithful - should nevertheless embody elements of hospitality across the differences in race, culture, language, social and bodily condition, and political affiliation.

4) The persuasive character of the liturgy should challenge the faithful to be involved in social concerns that afflict many parts of Asia like poverty, injustice, war, violation of human rights, and recurring natural disasters.

5) The liturgical catechesis and celebrations in Catholic schools, seminaries, and houses of formation should instill among the students a strong missionary spirit.

6) The liturgical celebration should end in the church but should continue in the parish and in its basic

ecclesial communities through the *martyria* and the *diakonia* of all the faithful especially the catechists, lay liturgical ministers, and lay professional volunteers.

7. From the sharing of our sisters and brothers from Churches that have suffered persecution we have come to the realization that the celebration of the liturgy especially the Eucharist is able to sustain and strengthen the faith and offer spiritual comfort to the faithful.

With deep gratitude we acknowledge the work of missionaries in this part of Asia who, inspired by the Holy Spirit, heeded the call of Christ to "Go and preach the Good News to all nations". Under the guidance of the same Spirit we commit ourselves to continue the work they have begun in the name of Jesus.

That in all things God may be glorified!

Statement: National Meeting of Diocesan Directors of Liturgy

NATIONAL MEETING OF DIOCESAN DIRECTORS OF LITURGY DELEGATES

We, the delegates to the 21st National Meeting of Diocesan Directors of Liturgy held in Dumaguete City from September 18-21, 2006 are happy to share with the clergy and faithful the results of the study and discussions on the Liturgy of the Sacrament of Marriage.

L) The catechesis and courses on marriage should include the history, and spirituality of the sacrament derived from the liturgical rite. The liturgical texts of marriage are a rich source for both the celebration of and catechesis on marriage.

2) There is a need to study the *Praenotanda* and explain more fully the texts of the rite, especially the scriptural readings and the nuptial blessing, and the gestures and symbols that are used: joining of the right hands, rings, arrhae, veil, cord, nuptial candles, and others. On

the other hand, introduction of new symbols requires careful study and submission to competent authority for approval.

3) It is highly recommended that under the guidance of the pastor or the minister delegated by him the bride and bridegroom take active part in the preparation of the liturgy of marriage, especially in the choice of prayers and scriptural readings and in the composition of the general intercessions.

4) The sacred character of the liturgy of marriage requires corresponding modesty in the attire of the bride and the bridal entourage and in the choice of songs, which should be liturgically appropriate.

5) If wedding missalettes are used, they should conform to duly approved formularies especially as regards the scrutiny, the exchange of consent, and the nuptial blessing. Explanations of wedding symbols should not be inserted in the missalettes.

6) The celebration of marriage should take place in a church as prescribed by liturgical norms.

7) The "*Pagdiriwang ng Pag-iisang Dibdib*," an inculturated rite of marriage approved by the Holy See, should be used in the entire Tagalog region for which it was approved. We urge that it be adapted to other local languages, so that its theological pastoral, and cultural richness may be unfolded to the Christian community.

8) Those whose services are hired for the celebration of marriage, e.g., wedding planners, coordinators,

photographers, musicians, and decorators should be properly instructed so as to ensure the sacred character of the rite.

We express gratitude to Almighty God for these days of liturgical study of the sacrament that mirrors the love of Christ for the Church. We thank His Excellency John F. Du and his clergy and people for their generosity in hosting this national meeting.

That in all things God be glorified!

Cases and Inquiries

FR. JAVIER GONZALEZ, OP

THE "ECCLESIA SUPPLET" PRINCIPLE: WHY AND WHEN IT IS APPLIED?

QUESTION:

My understanding of the "Ecclesia supplet" principle is that the Church, by supplying the corresponding missing power, validates certain acts performed invalidly by ordained ministers and/or by non-ordained persons. Is it correct? Now, on this regard, may I ask:

- 1) Why does the Church uphold this principle and to what cases is it applied?*
- 2) Is the principle of "Ecclesia supplet" applicable to the sacraments performed by a priest suspended 'a divinis'?*
- 3) What about the faithful who attend or receive a simulated "sacrament" ?*

ANSWER:

1) Why does the Church uphold the so-called "Ecclesia supplet" principle and to what cases does it apply?

The first thing I wish to do is to insert some correction in your understanding of the so-called "Ecclesia supplet" principle, which, as it is expressed in the question, is not very precise. In fact, concerning the mentioned principle, by supplying the corresponding missing power, the Church *does not validate certain acts that had been invalidly performed*, as you seem to indicate. Instead, what the Church actually does by supplying such lacking power is *giving validity from the beginning to certain acts which otherwise, by themselves, would have been invalid*, due to lack of administrative power in the person or persons who performed them. In other words, this supplying of power must not be understood as a convalidation of an invalid act.

I consider this correction important because a right understanding of this principle helps to see the relevance of this meaningful canonical feature, and facilitates also an answer to the question on "why the Church does uphold it."

The philosophy behind the popularly known as "Ecclesia supplet" principle is the following: In supplying the necessary power to certain acts which otherwise would have been invalid, the Church shows great respect for the certainty of juridical acts as well as her concern for not leaving without effect acts that should have it. (Actually good government within the Church depends in good measure on the validity of acts of executive/administrative power.) Thus in order to protect the faithful from the ill effects of invalid acts, the Church developed in her law the concept of "supplying" the necessary power by virtue of the law itself. This supplying of power may

be regarded indeed as a kind of "extraordinary delegation" by law, in the interest of the common good of the Church and of the faithful.

And so, for example, if a priest does something that requires executive power (e.g., hearing confessions, administering the sacrament of confirmation, or assisting at a marriage) before a group of persons, in the case he did not have such executive power, the Church would supply it because it was a case of common error.

This is expressly foreseen in the Code of Canon Law, whose canon 144 literally reads:

§ "In common error, whether of fact or of law, and in positive and probable doubt, whether of law or of fact, the Church supplies executive power of governance for both the external, and the internal forum.

§2 The same norm applies to the faculties mentioned in cc.882, 883, 966, and 1111 §/."

What kind of power then does the Church supply? The Church supplies only the *executive* power of governance, not the *legislative* and/or the *judicial* power. Neither does she supply the power of *order*, except for some very limited instances expressly mentioned in §2.

To what cases may this power supply be applied? Specifically to the following:

a) It is applied to cases "in common error, whether of fact or of law." *Error* is a false judgment concerning some matter. *Common error* exists when commonly something is erroneously believed. *Common error of fact*, when actually the majority of persons in a community are

mistaken; instead, *common error of law* takes place when something is done that may induce the majority of the community to error, even if they are not actually induced. A typical example: A parish priest tells his parishioners during a retreat that at a certain moment a priest will be coming to hear confessions of those who want to confess, not knowing that the priest lacked jurisdiction to hear confessions; the said priest came and heard the confessions of those who approached him. Another example: a priest, having by his own or someone else's inadvertence failed to secure the delegation required by can 1108, assists at a marriage of two Catholics; the likelihood is that most, if not all, of those present would assume the marriage to be normal and valid. In both cases, people would in fact be "in common error" and henceforth, in such situations the Church supplies the necessary faculty or delegation.

b) It is applied also to cases "*in positive and probable doubt, whether of law or of fact.*" *Positive doubt* is the one based on some reasons which do not produce certainty, while the *probable doubt* requires that those reasons be serious and strong, not superficial. *Doubt of law* takes place when there is doubt whether the law exists or about its scope, meaning, present binding force, etc. On the other hand, the *doubt of fact* exists when there is doubt whether in a particular situation the existing law is applicable or not. For instance, a parish priest may be in doubt as to the extent of the faculties for dispensation he has received. In such case, the Church would supply the necessary executive power.

c) It is applied, as in the examples just mentioned, to cases of error and doubt concretely in the administration

of the sacrament of *confirmation* by a bishop or priest (ce. 882 and 833), in the administration of the sacrament of *penance* by a priest (c. 966), and in the *assistance at marriages* by priests and deacons delegated by the local ordinary or by the parish priest (c. 1111 §1).

d) In addition, it is applied to the power of all the superiors and chapters of the institutes of consecrated life; without the Code saying whether it is true executive power of governance the one exercised by those institutes when they are not clerical of pontifical right, it certainly affirms that a good number of canons are applicable to them and in particular this c. 144, as mentioned in c. 596 (*Communications* 14 [1982] 151, ad c. 141).

e) The supply takes places both in the *external forum* (e.g. dispensations) and in the *internal forum* (e.g. sacramental absolution).

2) *Is the principle of "Ecclesia supplet" applicable to the sacraments performed by a priest suspended 'a divinis'?*

"Suspension" of the power of order (formerly called 'a divinis', not any more in the present Code) is a penalty that does not divest the priest validly ordained of the power of order; suspension only *prohibits its exercise* either totally or partially, according to whatever the law or precept imposing the suspension states (c. 1334). And since the suspension *prohibits only* (it does not invalidate) the exercise of the power of order, those acts of the power of order performed in spite of the suspension are valid, although illicit or unlawful. Moreover, the Code of canon

law establishes that "If a censure [*suspension*] prohibits the celebration of the sacraments..., the prohibition is *suspended* [*not absolved or remitted*] whenever this is necessary to provide for the faithful who are in danger of death." It furthermore adds: "If a *latue sententiae* censure [*suspension*] has not been declared, the prohibition is also suspended whenever one of the faithful requests a sacrament...; for any just reason it is lawful to make such a request." (c. 1335)

3) What about the faithful who attend or receive a simulated "sacrament"?

If a lay person shams being a priest and simulates the performance of a sacrament which requires priestly ordination - for instance saying Mass or hearing confessions -, such acts will always be *invalid*. The Church does not supply power in the instances of invalid Masses or sacramental reconciliations performed by non-ordained persons. God surely will provide in cases of these deficiencies; He will indeed take into account the good disposition or devout participation of the sincere faithful and help them by ways and plans of His own; but the Church cannot remedy such invalid acts with her general "Ecclesia supplet" principle, by virtue of which she only supplies executive power of governance.

December '06- January '07

Sunday Homilies

THE CARES OF THIS LIFE

Denis Minns, O.P.

First Sunday of Advent (C)

Fr. Denis Minns preaches on the things Jesus warns his disciples against concerning the Day of the Lord.

"But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare/"

Dissipation, drunkenness, and the cares of this life might seem a rather curious trio of things for Jesus to warn his disciples against. Our puzzlement will not be lessened if we agree with the Vulgate translation that the first thing Jesus warned might weigh down the heart was not dissipation, or debauchery, or over-indulgence, as

some English versions have it, but rather the result of these things - crapulence, or, in plainer English, a hangover.

Those who are drunk will not be alert enough to notice the signs of the approaching Kingdom, and the hung-over, even if they do hear the last trump, are likely to wish that they hadn't. But why should Jesus feel that his disciples are in need of a warning about drunkenness and its consequences? The gospels hardly suggest that this was a besetting sin of theirs.

Jesus, it is true, was called a drunkard by his enemies. And it is open to question whether, at the Marriage Feast of Cana, Mary's concern that the wine supply should be replenished had something to do with the coincidence of the sudden arrival at the feast of Jesus and his disciples and the sudden disappearance of all the wine. Even so, this is thin evidence to pin a charge of bibulousness on them.

But perhaps it is not a danger from that quarter that Jesus was warning his disciples against, at all. Perhaps it was, in fact, the danger from its opposite, the third thing the disciples are warned against: anxiety about the affairs of every-day life, the kind of anxiety that the drunken cannot feel, and that the crapulent do not want to feel. That is just the kind of anxiety to which sober people are much given - unavoidable anxiety about necessary things: about passing exams, for example, or about getting a job, and keeping it, about feeding, clothing, and housing a family, about educating children, about providing for elderly parents, or for one's own retirement.

You don't have to worry about these things when you are drunk, and you can't worry about them when you are hung-over. But perhaps Jesus is saying to the virtuously sober that they need to be on guard against these anxieties, unavoidable though they are, lest they so weigh down their hearts that they will be no better off than drunkards in, or just out of, their cups.

The drunken and the hung-over will not be alert enough to notice the coming of the kingdom: that much is obvious. But we are not in a position to congratulate ourselves if we can say, honestly and confidently, that we are not like that. For precisely because we are not like that, it is all the more likely that we will be soberly anxious about the necessities of life. And that anxiety might expose us to the very same risk as the drunkard's hang-over: the risk of not noticing the coming of that day, of not noticing the harbingers of the Kingdom, as they break in upon our own lives, and the lives of those around us.

If over-anxiety about the ordinary affairs of life is to be avoided, so too is over-anxiety about the extraordinary things foreshadowed in the Scriptures. Jeremiah prophesied for the House of Israel and the House of Judah a future of justice, righteousness and security. A future, then, to be looked forward to with eager longing. But the Christians of Thessalonica to whom St. Paul wrote were very anxious about the coming of that Kingdom.

St. Paul reminded them that they were destined not for God's wrath, but for salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. For that reason they were to go on doing

what they had learnt from the Lord Jesus, doing so more and more, increasing and abounding in love for one another and for all people, so that their hearts would be strengthened in holiness, and they would be blameless before their God and Father, at the coming of the Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Fr. Denis Minns is prior of the Priory of the Holy Spirit, Oxford, and a member of the Faculty of Theology of the University of Oxford.

CHRISTIANS IN EXILE

Anthony Axe, O.P.

Second Sunday of Advent (C)

Fr. Tony Axe preaches on this time of preparation for Christmas.

We are exiles, alienated from our true home in God's heavenly kingdom. If we're immersed in the message of the gospel, we should be sensitive to a feeling of alienation from the attitudes that prevail in the majority of people and governments.

We should feel uncomfortable when we hear of food mountains alongside starvation. Uncomfortable with the incongruity of shops decked out with expensive gewgaws no one could possibly need, when people sleep rough without the bare necessities of life. We ought to feel awkward when we join the rush of Christmas shoppers when there is no such rush to get into church before Christmas.

All such things should make us feel out of place in the world. Something is obviously wrong - we creatures of earth feel uncomfortable here, Jesus prays:

I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world. I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. (John 17:14)

We are in the world but not of it, because Jesus has given us God's word of justice, peace, truth and freedom.

The people of Israel had been in exile. Their country had been overthrown by the Babylonians and the important people deported to an alien land. But such is human adaptability that the next generation was born into exile and had their friends among the alien people. They were, to all intents and purposes, just as indigenous as that land's original inhabitants.

Yet they felt uncomfortable - they were God's chosen people, yet they were living among pagans, with pagan temples and gods all around. Not the pagan temples of high 'Street stores, but the temples of Astarte, Shamash and Marduk. Different names but standing for the same thing. The exiles couldn't fight for their own ideals because they weren't in their own country. Beginning to sound familiar?

Baruch calls on Jerusalem to remove her dress of sorrow and distress and put on the beauty of God's glory. Jerusalem will see the return of her children.

Their alienation is to end because God will return them home, where they can set up a way of life according to God's commands, where they can feel fully at home because their lives will conform to their beliefs.

The people did go back but the system they set up still had privilege and oppression, wealth alongside poverty. But then along came Jesus, God living among his people on earth, showing us how we must behave if we are to bring about his kingdom, the reign of justice

and peace on earth. We are to do, say, and think as Jesus did.

And what will this get us? Will it bring in the kingdom in one fell swoop? Of course it won't. It brought Jesus abandonment by his friends and death at the hands of his enemies. Is this the kingdom that God promises? Well, yes, in a way, it is.

According to St. Paul, we can prepare for Jesus' return to earth by increasing our love for one another, with knowledge and discernment, filled with the fruits of righteousness.

Jesus promised that when we help anyone in his name, we are helping him. We take up our cross and follow him, doing what he did, making him present on earth once again, losing our lives to gain them.

We pray now for Jesus' return in glory, the glory of justice, peace and love. The coming of Jesus into our lives can be whenever we want it to be. We only have to invite it by acting in love. Advent is a good time to concentrate on this, when we prepare ourselves to remember his coming in Bethlehem and pray that he will return soon.

Those who recognized their need for repentance and help received it from Jesus. If we recognize our need and ask God for it, we too will be given help to live according to the Gospel. Then, a time of justice and peace will become a reality, and we shall be aliens no longer.

Fr. Anthony Axe is parish priest of Melbourne in Derbyshire.

HERALDING THE REIGN OF GOD

Peter Clarke, O.P.

Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday) (C)

Fr Peter Clarke preaches on our true spiritual preparation for Christmas.

I was halfway through preaching on a parish mission. One of those attending the evening services told me that she liked my sermons, but then complained that I was too mild and gentle. She advised me, "You must give them hell. Father." Not exactly my idea of preaching, nor, I imagine, was it that of John the Baptist.

True enough, his message was harsh and abrasive, as well we know. He even described his listeners as a brood of vipers. Surely a number of those hearing this would have walked away in anger and disgust. No doubt this would have been your reaction if your parish priest were to address you in these terms during your Sunday Mass.

In fact the Baptist was not giving them hell. Nor was he giving them heaven. His call to repentance had one purpose - to show the way, provide an opening, to the Reign of God, the Kingdom of God, in their personal lives and in their land.

Above all, the Baptist was showing the people the way to Jesus, providing them with the opening to Jesus who in himself - the Son of God made man - embodied the Reign of God, the Kingdom of God.

In him, in his bodily form, lives the divinity in all its fullness, and in him you too find your own fulfillment. (Col. 2,9)

The Kingdom is eloquently described in the Preface of the Solemnity of Christ the King:

A Kingdom of truth and life, a Kingdom of holiness and grace, a Kingdom of justice, love and peace.

Inevitably sinful obstacles to embracing Jesus of the Kingdom and to being embraced by Jesus of the Kingdom had to be identified in order that they might be removed. This is what John meant by repentance.

John the Baptist must have been delighted with those of his listeners who asked him,

What must we do?

This would thrill any preacher. Here was an eagerness to go beyond listening to the preaching. Here was a willingness to apply the will of God to their own lives - knowing full well this would mean changing attitudes, ambitions and behavior.

The "Give-them-hell" lady would not have been ki such company. She was rather like the Pharisees who thought themselves to be righteous and despised others. Such people don't want from the preacher what they believe others need to hear. They recognize no obstacles to grace in their lives - no need to change. All of us, including preachers, must beware that we do not adopt this attitude of distancing ourselves in this way from others in the pews or elsewhere.

We have reached mid-Advent - the season when we prepare for the celebration of Christmas. This is also a season for celebrating the coming of Jesus into our lives. "What must we do?" is a question that occupies us greatly as we consider preparing our homes and plan every form of festivity — eats and drinks, greetings and presents for family and friends.

Amid all this activity, can we find the time and inclination to ask Jesus, "What must I do?" by way of a spiritual preparation for his coming into our lives, of our coming into the life of the Kingdom of Jesus? What are the obstacles to this coming about? What are the areas in our lives that call for repentance? Who can help us to find answers?

John the Baptist spoke in terms of the justice that should characterize the Reign of God on earth. In so doing he confronted the patterns of injustice of his time and place that were tolerated as normal. We must do the same and in the particularity of our own individual lives, both as private persons and as people living in society.

In distancing ourselves from others, in closing ourselves to them, in being injurious to them, we are placing obstacles to the Lordship of Jesus over us. During the season of Advent the Reign of God is being heralded to us. It is for us to discern and discover what this is saying to us and then to act upon it. This is the only valid spiritual preparation for our celebration of Christmas.

Fr. Peter Clarke is an assistant pastor at St. Patricks Cathedral, Barbados.

IN THE WOMBS OF THE WOMEN

John Farrell, O.P.

Fourth Sunday of Advent (C)

Fr. John Farrell preaches on the visitation of our Blessed Lady to her cousin, Elizabeth.

The lectionary readings today are full of greetings, announcements, introductions and declarations. New things are beginning.

New characters are presented. A great drama - the divine-human drama of salvation - is to come to its fullness. The stage is set, and we ourselves are not the audience but co-characters to be caught up in the scope and sweep of the majestic creativity of the Father, Spirit, and the crucified Christ.

There is a quickening within divine providence. A new light is dawning on the landscapes of grace.

From one hill-top village to another a young woman moves "with great haste". How beautiful on the mountain are the feet of her who bears Good News!

For he himself will be Peace.

Shepherds and sheep await angelic visitations. In the East, camels and kings set out on a star-lit trek. The ox and the ass know their manger; they will soon know their master. Two pregnant women meet.

Two pregnant women meet. It is a scene that could be seen any day in any Tesco's supermarket or any school playground. The kindness of women. Here is the goodness of the ordinary and the mundane and the marvels of life and life-bearing.

In this "mystery" of our Lady's visitation of Elizabeth, the ordinary and the extraordinary are caught up in each other. Not just in the transfiguration of the ordinary into the extraordinary. But in the transfiguration of the extraordinary into the ordinary. The divine Word is abbreviated into the wonder of maternity. And Elijah is dancing in the chariot of his mother's womb. Grace abounding.

Here blessings are not just descending from on high, but they are magnified in sharing and they are glorified in praise and thanksgiving ascending. That God can bless us is one thing: that he can empower us to bless one another is the same thing, the same gift. Elizabeth and Mary sing their duet of blessings shared and blessings abounding.

Elizabeth adds her line of prayer to the Ave Maria begun by the angel Gabriel in wonder at "the most blessed among all women". And Mary in her Magnificat sings the praises of her Spirit-conceived Son in his obedient mission from the Father - "from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace".

There is nothing outwardly remarkable to be seen by a passer-by or a curious neighbor. In Jerusalem what is to be rendered to Caesar is rendered to Caesar; the builders are laying stone upon stone in the renovated Temple; the priests are daily offering sacrifices at the altar; and Herod's soldiers are sharpening their swords. The ordinary carries on in the usual routine of daily life.

But grace abounds. And the world is changing, in the wombs of the women,

Fr. John Farrell is superior of Saint Dominic's Priory in Newcastle.

SILENCE AT CHRISTMAS

Euan Marley, O.P.

Christmas

Fr. Euan Marley preaches on the Gospel read at Mass during the Day.

A friend of mine was abroad for a year and after he returned he discovered that the pubs were now serving something strange and wonderful - non-alcoholic beer. He hadn't tasted any but he asked me if I knew what it was like. I assured him that it was just like ordinary beer, the only difference being that after two or three pints, you didn't become wonderfully witty and the centre of attention. Judging by the look he gave me, I am not sure that he realized it was the beer.

Whatever eloquence alcohol produces, or appears to produce, carry on drinking and it soon has quite the opposite effect. Some drinkers start to demonstrate a strange phenomenon where they appear to have on the tip of their tongue an ultimate wisdom. They are ready to say words which will express, out of the deepest recesses of their heart, the great truth that they have just discovered, the great love aroused in them by the numbing effects of considerable amounts of alcohol.

It wouldn't do to be too eager in waiting for this great revelation. It's not going to come. The drunken philosopher won't actually succeed in getting any words out. Instead they will appear like some Abraham Lincoln, caught in a time warp, ceaselessly repeating the first fraction of a second when he opens his mouth - he takes

a deep breath, raises his finger in a dramatic pose and then proceeds to say nothing.

The process can be endlessly repeated. Due to the natural confluence of things, there are often other people in a similar state, who are relaxed enough and hopeful enough to wait for the revelation without any sense of frustration or disappointment, no matter how often the non-speaker fails to deliver.

I shouldn't mock, as there is something charming in this little slice of life, which will be observed many times during this season of cheer. *In vino Veritas*, which usually means that drink weakens our ability to dissemble to others or to deceive ourselves, a human occupation that requires rather more concentration than the state of intoxication allows.

It can also mean that the drunken person has reached the utterly relaxed state where he starts to express something of his fundamental humanity. There is a certain state of drunkenness where we can see in its simplest form a very human desire manifesting itself.

This desire is the desire to say, once and for all, all that we have to say. People are speaking animals but speech is difficult. We say much that we wish we hadn't said, we fail to say what we wish we had said, and when we finish saying what we have to say, we find that it's just not enough. I think a substantial part of the fear of death is the fear that we will die without saying what we really need to say, that, as Hamlet says, the rest is silence.

Despite the carol, Christmas was not really a silent night. There was quite a lot of noise, shepherds talking

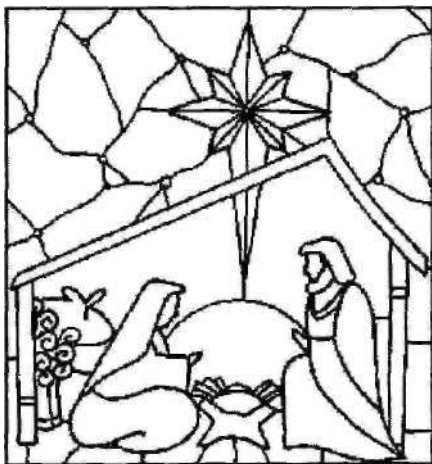
to each other, angels singing, and wise men wandering towards Jerusalem to disturb the peace, calling for the newborn king.

Yet we know what the carol means. There is a silence at the heart of the Christmas story, a silence that imposes itself on all the participants. Yet here we come close to a great Christian paradox. "In the beginning was die Word", and tiris silence is in fact the true speech of God,

God alone can express himself in a single word. God alone does this through all eternity and this word is his Son, the speaking of his whole self in the breath of the Spirit. A perfect word, which is very much like silence.

The drunken mystic, the chatterbox, Mr. Angry shouting at the top of his voice, and the great bores of this world, masters of the art of droning on and on, are all showing, whether they know it or not, a desire to perfect in themselves the image of the Trinity who made them. In the beginning was the Word, in the end there will be the created word, echoing it in joy.

Fr. Euan Marley O.P. is Subprior of the Priory of ike Moly Cross, Leicester, and Catholic Chaplain to Leicester Royal Infirmary.



LOST TO THE TEMPLE

Colin Carr, O.P.

Feast of the Holy Family (C)

Fr. Colin Carr preaches on the finding of the child Jesus in the temple.

"I don't belong to anyone."

This could be a manifesto of the confidently tough-minded, of those who pride themselves on their independence and resist attempts to get them into a committed relationship to a person or a party.

But it could equally be the lament of a person who feels isolated, unsupported, vulnerable to exploiters and bullies.

Most of us prefer a compromise between independence and belonging; we like to have a place, a family, an institution of which we can say, "I belong here," while not wanting that place, family or institution to take away our freedoms.

Because we want a compromise, we will in fact often experience the thing to which we belong as ambiguous. We couldn't be without our family, but we sometimes find it oppressive and damaging to our emotional health, whether that family is one parent and one child, a commune, or a widely extended clan.

Families tend to have patterns of acceptable behavior, and to expect us to take part in various rituals of belonging, especially around Christmas time. And sometimes we feel

the need to opt out, to express a different way of being, to bring our unacceptable partner to the party, or to spend Christmas in a Zen monastery. Of course that could just be a desire to shock, but it could be a genuine vision of the way life could be if we thought outside the box which the family has been trying to keep us in.

Like Jesus, Hannah, the mother of the prophet Samuel, thought outside the box. When Hannah at last conceived a child, she didn't cling to this longed-for child, and say, "Now I have a child, I'll make him stay with me all the time." That might have seemed reasonable; but her response to the drama of moving from childlessness to motherhood was not to celebrate the vindication of her rights, but to acknowledge God's gifting and to make of her child a gift to God. (1 Sam 1)

There are people who enjoy giving more than receiving, not just because it gives them a buzz or makes others beholden to them, but because they know that their life and the lives of those they love are gifts, and that giving *is* as important to us as breathing. In fact, it *is* the breath of God's Spirit within us.

Jesus' behavior in Jerusalem is, by "normal" family standards, bizarre. It certainly doesn't seem to conform to the commandment to honor our parents. It is either childishy irresponsible or far too mature for a twelve-year-old. It causes massive anxiety, disruption of plans, presumably expense, and doesn't even result in the teeniest indication of regret, let alone an honest apology.

Something important must have happened to the twelve-year-old lad in Jerusalem, particularly in the temple. Later he would cause massive disruption in the same

temple, and that may have been precisely linked to the story in today's gospel.

When he disrupted the Temple later on, he quoted the saying "My house shall be called a house of prayer". Luke's Gospel lays great stress on Jesus' life of prayer - his business with his Father's affairs, his orientation towards his centre. In the Temple he must have found a house of prayer - and for the "doctors" then, as for Dominicans now, prayer and questioning go hand in hand.

This was his food and drink, this was what he was about, this was more important than return journeys and common courtesies. Many people would see his answer to his parents as indicating a special relationship with the Father, but perhaps Jesus found it astonishing that anyone would want to do anything other than spend as much time as possible in the house of prayer.

This episode certainly wasn't about Jesus' rebellion against family life; but it indicated that there will always be an ambiguity and tension in *family* life if we take seriously the centrality of God in *all* life. Traditionally the finding in the Temple is one of the joyful mysteries; but the joy is already fraught with questioning, the sense that love will entail loss, that we cannot possess those we love.

The wisest response we can make to this ambiguity, this foreboding, is to store these things up in our heart.

Fr. Colin Carr lives in St. Dominic's Priory, Newcastle, and is theological consultant to the North East Churches.

BORN OF A WOMAN

Richard J. Ounsworth, O.P.

Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God

Fr. Richard Ounsworth preaches on the importance of Mary's title "Mother of God".

The Church celebrates a great many feasts of saints throughout the year. Men and women from all parts of the world, all eras of the Church's history and all areas of life are commemorated, their examples of holiness considered and their prayers invoked. But today's celebration is rather more than another saint's day, even an important one. Today we celebrate not just a person but also a title, and one with a dogmatic, doctrinal significance.

We are often attacked as Catholics for being dogmatic. The word "doctrine" is used as a term of abuse. But we shouldn't be ashamed of these things: to be dogmatic is to have beliefs, to make claims that certain things are true; to be doctrinal is to proclaim these truths, to make them known to a world in sore need of the good news of the Gospel. And the Gospel is not good news if it does not contain truths, and not much use if it is not told.

And so today we celebrate the fact that Mary is Mother of God. This title - the original Greek is *theotokos* which means "God-bearer" - is not simply an honorific, a piece of flattery; we're not in the business of being sycophantic here, but are actually claiming that Mary, a humble young woman from a nowhere town, a nowhere country, in a seemingly God-forsaken era of human

history, gave birth to God. This truth is at once so outrageous, and yet so essential to our faith and to our salvation, that it caused massive theological rows in the earliest times of the Church's life; having been carried like a burning torch through the storms of controversy, this truth now shines forth as a beacon to carry us into a new year.

Of course, the real significance of this title, and of the arguments that surrounded it, is not so much in who Mary is as in who Jesus is. Mary is called "Mother of God" because her first-born son, Jesus of Nazareth, who was circumcised two thousand years ago in Palestine, is really and truly God. Not "God" in inverted commas, not "God in a way" or semi-divine or "so perfectly in touch with the divine that he can be called "God" in a very real sense". He was, is and ever shall be God, the divine Son of the divine Father, the Word that proceeds eternally from the Father. God.

And God was born of a woman, born under the Law - that is to say, born in a particular time and place, into a particular culture. This is the point that Saint Paul is making in today's second reading. Saint Paul's writings are often interpreted as if, for him, the Christian faith is about timeless religious truths, truths about the way life is, the way people are, and the way God is. But in fact his teaching, his doctrine, is thoroughly grounded in history, and in the history of the man Jesus. The religious dogmas that Saint Paul teaches revolve around the birth of a child in Bethlehem and the death of that same innocent one on a hill outside Jerusalem.

And if that child was not God, and if that man nailed to the cross was not God, and if the man who came out of the tomb to Uve forever is not God, then all our religion is futile. Whether our idea of religion is a set of philosophical propositions, a strict moral code, a sense of communion with "the divine" or a warm philanthropic glow, without the historical grounding of the birth of the man who is God, it is not Christianity and it is not the Good News.

For our faith is not a human philosophy but a divine truth. To put it bluntly, you can't make it up! When the shepherds first heard the Good News from the angel, they told everyone they met, and were met with wonder - a wonder composed of amazement, incredulity and outright mockery, one would imagine. But they saw the child Jesus and went away glorifying and praising God.

If we dare to model ourselves on those shepherds and tell the Good News that Mary is Mother of God to those we meet, we will equally be met with scoffing and contempt. No matter: we have encountered God because we have encountered Jesus, and we go out glorifying and praising God. The Lord has made his face to shine upon us, and it is the face of Mary's son.

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CALL, REVELATION AND MISSION

Isidore Clarke, O.P.

Epiphany

Fr. Isidore Clarke preaches on the various aspects of the celebration of the revealing of Christ to the Gentiles.

The word "Epiphany" means "showing forth" or "revelation". On today's feast we celebrate God revealing himself, in the person of the baby Jesus, to the pagan wise men from the East. So, at the beginning of Christ's life God reached out to the pagan world and offered it his salvation.

Since those wise men from the East were astrologers, it's not surprising that God should have led them by a star to discover where the promised king of the Jews was to be born. God built on their natural curiosity about the heavens and their skill in interpreting them.

This, was the starting-point for a journey, which led to faith in Jesus. Each of us will have our own starting-point, and a special kind of star to guide us in our search for the truth.

But the star did not guide the magi all the way to Christ. For the final stage of their journey they needed to consult the Jewish religious leaders, who said that the Scriptures foretold that the promised king would be born in Bethlehem. We, too, need God's revelation in the Scriptures to discover Christ.

When the wise men found Jesus they saw a normal-looking baby. They had to make the leap of faith to

recognize that he was not only the promised king of the Jews, but God himself. In Jesus God revealed himself in human form, as a baby, and later as a child and grown man.

That revelation is what we mean by 'Epiphany' or 'showing forth'. In the person of Jesus the almighty and unapproachable God, the creator of heaven and earth, expressed divine love in a human way, a way familiar to us all. He could be seen and heard, embraced with love, and, later, nailed to a cross.

The wise men brought Jesus the precious gifts of gold, acknowledging him as king, frankincense, as God, and myrrh, foreshadowing his death. In return for these material gifts, Jesus gave them something much more precious «* faith in him. Instinctively they adored him.

This exchange of gifts is reflected in the Mass. As we offer the work of human hands - bread and wine - God welcomes our gifts and transforms them into the very person of our crucified and risen Lord. He then gives himself to us as nourishment to strengthen us in our life as Christians.

The feast of the Epiphany is all about call, revelation, and mission. God called the pagan wise men to welcome his salvation. He revealed himself to them in the person of the baby Jesus, And when they returned home, they would have told others about the wonders they had seen.

If so, they would have been the first missionaries to the pagan world. Like the magi, we are called to welcome Jesus with faith, and to be epiphanies, proclaiming the Good News.

Though Matthew's Gospel is the most Jewish of the four, it embraces the theme of God reaching out to the

whole world - to both Jews and Gentiles. Near the beginning God reaches out to the pagan world, represented by the magi. At the very end of the Gospel the risen Lord commissions his followers to proclaim the Good News to the whole world.

Finally, in the story of the magi we see this part of the infancy narrative foreshadowing both Christ's death and resurrection. King Herod's attempt to kill Jesus, the King of the Jews, would reach its fulfillment when Christ was crucified as "King of the Jews".

The flight to Egypt, whereby Jesus escaped death at Herod's hands, imperfectly foreshadowed his resurrection from the grave. The massacre of the Holy Innocents foreshadowed the opposition and persecution Christ and his followers would meet. The story of the magi contains the central themes of Matthew's Gospel in a nutshell!

Today's feast celebrates God revealing himself in the person of Jesus. This he continues to do in other ways - in the sacraments, and in the people we meet, especially those in need. We need the God-given sensitivity of the magi to recognize and welcome Jesus in the different ways he manifests himself to us.

Like the pagan wise men we are all called to worship Jesus, as we welcome the salvation he offers to each one of us. Then we must become epiphanies, proclaiming Christ in the way we live and in what we say.

Fr. Isidore Clarke is a member of the community at Holy Cross Priory, Leicester, and provincial chaplain to the Dominican Secular Institute.

DIVINE SONSHIP AND MISSION

Robert Pollock, O.P.

Baptism of the Lord (C)

FK Robert Pollock preaches on how this feast leads us from the Christmas season into the Ordinary Time of the Church's Calendar.

Today's celebration is one of great importance, containing many rich and important themes. It celebrates an end and a beginning, the end of the Christmas season and the beginning of the Church's year, ordinary time.

The boundary between these two areas is not clearly demarcated; the Baptism of the Lord contains what has gone before, and points to what is to come. At the beginning of Christ's public ministry we can detect some of the themes which we shall encounter in the course of the Church's year.

During the Christmas liturgies we experienced once again the birth of Christ, "the fulfillment of prophecy and the focal point of history", as Cardinal Newman described it, in its two presentations in the Gospels. In the feast of the Nativity we witnessed the local presentation, witnessed by the Jewish people represented by Mary, Joseph and the lowly shepherds; in the feast of the Epiphany we witnessed the wider, grander presentation, when Christ was presented to all the nations of the earth, in the persons of the Magi.

We also bring into our understanding of the feast the dark element found in the nativity narratives, the

Jcilling of the innocents, a reminder that that the joy and peace associated with the birth of Christ, his mission, the mission of the Church, will always be opposed by sinful humanity. Today's feast marks the end of the closed, private period of Christ's life, and marks the beginning of the open, public ministry.

The two most important features in today's Gospel reading, marking the beginning of Christ's public ministry, are the baptism of Christ by John the Baptist, and the appearance of the Holy Spirit and the voice confirming the divine Sonship of Christ,

John's voice was heard clearly during the Advent liturgy, proclaiming the coming of the Saviour, and denying that he himself was the Messiah. John knew the limitations of his mission. He could proclaim and point the way only. John also knew the limitations of the baptism he conferred:

I baptize you with water, but someone is coming who is more powerful than I am.,, he will baptize you with Holy Spirit and with fire.

The baptism conferred by John was concerned with repentance and the forgiveness of sins. It was not necessary for the sinless Christ to be baptized; he accepted baptism from John to identify himself with sinful humanity, whom he had come to redeem.

The Father proclaimed the divine Sonship of Christ:

You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

The Spirit then descended upon Christ, the final preparation for his mission When anointed by the Spirit

he began his public ministry, the preaching and teaching of the kingdom.

Baptism confers life, but it is also connected with death; in order to gain new life, we must die to the old. The baptism of Christ foreshadowed his death. It was his mission to suffer, die and rise again.

When we received the sacrament of baptism, we were admitted into membership of the Church, the body of Christ, and became sharers in his mission. We were immersed in the waters, died and buried with him; we rise again because of the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.

The Church will explain to us the public ministry of Christ, the preaching of the kingdom, in the daily and Sunday readings. The divine, redemptive mission of Christ is still active. The kingdom will be preached and built up slowly and gently, often among the poor the outcasts, sinners, but whose poverty and weakness enabled them to grasp more easily divine truth. The mysteiy of the Trinity, present at the baptism of Christ, will be proclaimed: all peoples will be welcomed into the kingdom.

As we begin the Church's year, we do so in the knowledge of what has been conferred on us by our baptism, that we, too, have been commanded to proclaim the kingdom in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who were present when Christ was baptized in the Jordan.

Fr, Robert Pollock is a member of the Dominican community at Blackfriars, Glasgow.

THE BEST IS KEPT 'TIL LAST

Neil Ferguson, O.P.

Second Sunday of the Year (C)

Fr. Neil Ferguson preaches a homily for the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time.

"Who then is chief butler of God? The priest who offers libations to him, the truly great High Priest, who, having received a draught of everlasting graces, offers himself in return, pouring in an entire libation full of unmixed wine."

In this text a Jewish writer called Philo, who lived just after the time of Jesus, contrasts the faithless butler of Pharaoh with the faithful steward of God, the High Priest. Elsewhere the same writer identifies the faithful steward and eternal High Priest as the "First-born divine Word". These thoughts have obvious links with the New Testament. They are traditions which appear in the New Testament. In John's Gospel especially, Jesus is identified with the divine Word of God, the Word who becomes flesh and dwells amongst us. In the letter to the Hebrews, Jesus is the true High Priest, the one who has entered the Holy of Holies, heaven, bearing his own blood as an atoning sacrifice, "thus securing an eternal redemption." (Heb 9:12)

In sacred Scripture, wine or a cup of wine can stand for God's wrath (Jer 25:15), but it can also describe or stand for joy, plenty and salvation: "How can I repay the Lord's goodness to me? The cup of salvation I will raise, I will call upon the name of the Lord." (Ps 116:12,

13) In Psalm 23 David's cap runs over at a festive table which has been set by God. Elsewhere, wine is described as "gladdening the heart of man" (Ps 104:15). Jesus draws on the richness of this imagery at the Last Supper, where he identifies the cup of the New Covenant with the cup of his blood. The blood of the grape becomes the blood of Christ.

All of this hovers in the background as we read today's Gospel, the wedding feast at Cana. Although it is a very straightforward event, an invitation to a wedding feast, everything that Jesus and his mother does are charged with much deeper significance. Details mentioned in passing can yield a prayerful harvest. As, within the story, good things get better, water into wine, the good wine kept 'til last, so within the life of Christ as a whole the good gets better. Here, at the beginning of the Gospel, Jesus works the miracle of water into wine. Towards the end of his life he works the greater miracle of wine becoming his blood. The blood of the grape becomes the blood of Christ; the best wine is kept 'til last. The Word who takes flesh at the beginning of the Gospel goes through death to hell and emerges victorious on the, other side, in the Resurrection, with that same flesh no longer subject to death and sin; the best is kept 'til last.

Consider one of the details: "Now six stone jars were standing there, for the Jewish rites of purification," Why only six? As some commentators point out, in a Gospel so full of symbolism, why not the mystical number seven? As we consider the scene, though, it becomes clear that there are really seven: the seventh is the Lord himself. Our Lord is the one who contains the best wine, the real

wine of salvation and the water for purification. That wine is his blood, which poured from his side on the cross; the water is that which poured with it. "But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water." Remember, the best is kept 'til last, the seventh jar is not broached until Christ's death, later in the story, late on the Day of Preparation: "My hour has not yet come."

St. Catherine of Siena dwells on this when she talks of the wine of Christ's charity being broached on the cross by 'the fiery hands of the cellarer, the Holy Spirit'.

O pierced wine-cask, with the wine you offer you intoxicate every loving desire...

At Cana then, Jesus acts out in an earthly way his heavenly role as God's butler and High Priest. Cana shows us in miniature what happens on a cosmic scale, Jesus, our High priest, keeps the best wine 'til last, till which takes away the sins of the world

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GOD'S SPIRIT OF POWER

John Orme Mills, O.P.

Third Sunday of the Year (C)

Fr. John Orme Mills preaches a homily for the third Sunday of the year.

Imagine what it was like to be in that synagogue in Nazareth.

Stories have circulated about this amazing local man who has been baptized by John the Baptist and then done all sorts of wonderful things, and preached with extraordinary power and wisdom. And at last he has come back to his hometown. At last the people who have known him for years have a chance to see for themselves why everybody is talking about him.

Jesus reads from the prophet Isaiah the momentous words: "The Spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me." And then he goes on to say to the people crowded in that synagogue: "This passage of scripture has come true today, as you heard it being read." What does he mean by that? It would seem as if he is saying that these words of Isaiah apply to him, personally. That he is the Saviour whom the Israelites had been waiting for - waiting for so long. That he is the chosen one sent by God who would free them and lead them into a new kingdom, a holy kingdom - who would bring them close again to God. That he is the Messiah, in other words.

In at least some ways the problems a lot of people have today about God are not unlike the problems about God which many of the Jews of Jesus' time had. Those Jews believed that for centuries the Spirit of God, which had fired the great prophets of old, had vanished. There were no more prophets in the land. The promises of a new and glorious Israel were not turning into realities. In fact, the opposite was the case: Israel was a beaten nation, and God was silent. Unlike in our own country, everybody believed that there was a God, but it was felt he was so remote that he was out of all human contact.

Mind you, people went on longing for the return of the Spirit. But a growing number of them came to think this would only happen at the end of time, at the end of everything. On the other hand, from its very start it's been a basic claim of Christianity that the Spirit of God has come back already. The Bible says that this happened in the coming of Jesus, with his message that the reign of God was breaking into our world, that the new heaven and new earth were no longer just a dream, a fantasy. And this brings us back to the sermon with which we started our own sermon: the sermon which St. Luke tells us Jesus preached in Nazareth's synagogue about 1,970 years ago.

We do not need to know the rest of the story, which will be next week's gospel reading, in order to ask ourselves the question: could Jesus' hearers possibly have taken seriously the sort of things he was telling them? The fact that he had been a boy whom they had all known would have been no problem if he had

just done comforting things - miracles, and so on. What was bound to upset some of them was that he insisted on talking to them about power, big power... maybe God's power, but power all the same: power "to proclaim liberty to captives" and "to set the downtrodden free". It's power, after all, which is the thing that can make even the best of us feel threatened.

If some of the people in that synagogue misunderstood Jesus, it's excusable really. But we surely can't be so easily excused. For it still hasn't sunk into people's heads that God's power is just not like our idea of power at all. What Jesus showed the world, in his words but above all in his life, is that God's power is the power of love, the power which looks like weakness - something so different that our minds alone can't grasp it. It's terribly important that we don't overlook what God is doing in us just because it doesn't fit in with our own ideas of how God should work in our lives.

Fr- John Orme Mills, O.P. is a member of the Priory of St. Michael Archangel, Cambridge.



WHO WANTS TO BE A PROPHET?

Vivian Boland, O.P.

Fourth Sunday of the Year (C)

Fr. Vivian Boland preaches a homily for the fourth Sunday of the year.

Why did things go so badly wrong in the synagogue at Nazareth in such a ridiculously short space of time? One minute Jesus enjoys unanimous approval, his hometown listeners astonished by his gracious words. The next minute they are universally enraged to the point of threatening him with violence. It is common human experience to feel one has said the wrong thing or been misunderstood. But the breakdown in relations between Jesus and his own people is difficult to understand.

Was it his fault or theirs? Was it something he said or something they said? They merely chipped in with what seems like a reasonable comment: "Is not this Joseph's son?" He replies by assuming that they are thinking of him as a physician who ought to heal himself, a wonder-worker who ought to do at home what he has become famous for doing elsewhere. He then proclaims that a prophet is never accepted in his own country, and cites examples from the careers of Elijah and Elisha to show how God's care reached beyond the boundaries of Israel when there were already many needy people within those boundaries.

Was Jesus claiming a status that they considered extreme by placing himself in the line of the great prophets

of Israel? What kind of threat or offence to his listeners was implied in his declaration that no prophet is acceptable in his own country?

Some contemporary figures, who might be described as prophetic, endured violent opposition from their own people. A Hindu extremist assassinated Mahatma Gandhi. John Hume was obliged to protect his home against attacks from his own rather than the other side. What entitles them to be called prophetic is their ability to see the humanity of the enemy and the energy they put into reminding their own side that they share a common, needy humanity with the enemy.

Jesus is certainly prophetic in this way, witness his parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), his healing of Gentile sick (Luke 17) and his death on behalf of all people (Luke 24:46-47). He teaches his followers that they are to be merciful, as the Father is merciful, and shows gracious care towards all, even towards enemies (Luke 6:32-36). Preachers of God's Word carry a message that reaches beyond racial, political and religious boundaries to link up with the humanity of the other person, who is also a son or daughter of God, a brother or sister of Jesus Christ.

A genuine prophet is always reluctant, knowing the dangers of the task. Jeremiah pleads his youthfulness as an excuse for not accepting the prophetic call, and is assured of God's help in the confrontations that must follow. It seems like a nice job, carrying God's Word to the people. That Word is always just, truthful and gracious. But it is not always welcome, because it is also a sword that penetrates human hearts and exposes the foundations of falsehood and injustice. The prophet must confront his

own people, sooner or later, with this gracious and penetrating Word. (The first member of his people who must be confronted is, of course, himself.)

Jesus Christ is not just another prophet. He is not just the greatest of the bearers of the Word of God. We believe that he *is* the Word of God, full of grace and truth, come to his own home, and his own people received him not (John 1:11). Whatever our own home or country is, whatever the nation, tribe, race, language, politics or philosophy with which we identify ourselves, the Word of God comes to dwell among us. As gracious, he is welcome. As penetrating to the foundations of falsehood and injustice, he may not be so welcome. The temptation is to domesticate Jesus and his good news, to make it ours, familiar, homely and comforting. But the Word is a sword, and when preached faithfully it wounds its hearers with a wound that opens to new life.

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